Challenges of Supervising Independent Contractors

Casey Harper, Examination Manager, FINRA, Dallas District Office

Casey Harper is an examination manager in FINRA's Dallas District Office. He began his career with FINRA in 2005, and is currently responsible for managing a staff of six examiners who conduct routine cycle examinations. Mr. Harper holds a bachelor's degree in finance from Texas A&M University.

Ken Bell, Vice President, Audit, Cetera Financial Group

Ken Bell is Vice President, Audit, for Cetera Financial Group, a position he has held since Cetera's inception in 2010. Prior to the formation of Cetera, he held the same position with ING Advisors Network. He is responsible for leading a compliance audit program for the group's independent broker-dealers, and is involved in other group risk management projects and initiatives. Prior to joining ING in 2000, Mr. Bell was with NASD's (nka FINRA) Atlanta District Office, where he spent most of his 17 years managing a field examination staff. He was also significantly involved in developing a training and performance support system for NASD examiners. Prior to his work with NASD, Mr. Bell worked in corporate accounting. He is a graduate of the University of Georgia and received the designation of Certified Regulatory and Compliance Professional (CRCP) through the FINRA Institute at Wharton. Mr. Bell is frequent speaker at industry conferences and is an active member of the National Society of Compliance Professionals (NSCP), the Financial Services Institute (FSI), the Securities Industry Financial Markets Association (SIFMA) and the Georgia Society of CPAs. He recently completed a three-year term on the NSCP Board of Directors, and currently serves on the FINRA District 7 Committee.

Brooks Brown, Examination Manger, FINRA, Atlanta District Office

Brooks Brown joined FINRA's New Orleans District Office in 2001, and then transferred to FINRA's Atlanta District Office in 2006. Since April 2011, Mr. Brown has supervised five staff members who conduct routine examinations to review for compliance with FINRA and SEC rules. Prior to joining FINRA, Mr. Brown worked with Trustmark National Bank in Jackson, Mississippi, from 1999 to 2001 as an equity analyst in Trustmark's Trust Department. He earned the Certified Regulatory and Compliance Professional designation from the Wharton School in 2013. Mr. Brown is a graduate of Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi, and he also earned an M.B.A from Millsaps College's Else School of Management.

Abel Garcia Jr., Senior Vice President, Risk Management, and Chief Compliance Officer, Prospera Financial Services

Abel Garcia Jr. is the Senior Vice President, Risk Management & CCO of Prospera Financial Services. As such, he directs the firm's risk management and regulatory compliance issues. Prior to joining Prospera, Mr. Garcia began his career in internal audit for a regional banking institution. He qualified for the Certified Public Accounting certificate in 1988 and transitioned from the accounting field to the financial industry in 1993. He accepted the position as controller of Prospera in 1994 and progressed from CFO to CCO in 2005, taking over the firm's compliance functions that year. Mr. Garcia graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a bachelor's degree in accounting and currently holds the Series 7, 63, 27 and 87 securities licenses.

South Region Compliance Seminar

Challenges of Supervising Independent Contractors

November 20, 2014

FINRA
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Challenges of Supervising Independent Contractors

- Moderator – Casey Harper, Examination Manager, FINRA Dallas District Office
- Panelist – Abel Garcia Jr., Senior Vice President, Risk Management, and Chief Compliance Officer, Prospera Financial Services
- Panelist – Ken Bell, Vice President, Audit, Cetera Financial Group
- Panelist – Brooks Brown, Examination Manager, FINRA Atlanta District Office

Challenges of Supervising Independent Contractors

- **Common Challenges**
  - Direct Business
  - Cybersecurity
  - Outside Business Activities
  - Social Media/Web Presence
  - Outside RIAs
  - Onboarding and Vetting of New Representatives
  - Branch Inspection Program

Challenges of Supervising Independent Contractors

- **Direct Business**
  - Supervisory Systems
    - Transaction blotters
    - Commission reconciliation
    - Suitability considerations (e.g., source of funds)
  - Surveillance
    - Manual vs. automated
    - Patterns of red flag transactions (e.g., switches, exchanges)
    - Sufficiency of blotter data

Challenges of Supervising Independent Contractors

- **Cybersecurity**
  - Information Security
    - Data breaches
    - Encryption for data transmission
    - Branch office safeguards and standards
  - Procedures and Controls
    - Information security standards, data breaches, data encryption
    - Process for verification and surveillance
    - Branch supervision

Challenges of Supervising Independent Contractors

- **Outside Business Activities**
  - Supervisory Review
    - Consideration of red flags
    - Documentation
    - Branch inspections
  - Training
    - Robust education regarding Form U4 disclosure requirements

Challenges of Supervising Independent Contractors

- **Social Media / Web Presence**
  - Initial Approval
    - Prior approval requirements
    - Documentation
  - Ongoing Supervision
    - Periodic reviews
    - Third party vendors
    - Branch inspections
  - Detection of Undisclosed Activities
    - Internet alerts

Challenges of Supervising Independent Contractors

- **Outside RIAs**
  - Supervisory Systems
    - Automatic data feed when possible
    - Written Supervisory Procedures assessing:
      - Supervisory obligations (reference Notice to Members 94-44 and 96-33)
      - Red flag identification and sampling methodology
      - BD-to-IA client movements
    - Recording/supervising and identifying red flags
    - Branch inspections
  - Correspondence and Advertising
    - Incorporate IA communications into supervisory processes
    - Consolidated Account Reports (reference Notice to Members 10-19)

Challenges of Supervising Independent Contractors

- **Onboarding and Vetting of New Representatives**
  - Background Investigations
    - Undisclosed matters:
      - OBAs, web presence, financial impairments, criminal matters
    - Disclosed matters/activities (e.g., OBAs)
  - Defining "Independence"
    - Expectations and role of supervisor/compliance
    - Consequences of non-disclosure

Challenges of Supervising Independent Contractors

- **Branch Inspection Program**
  - Program Implementation (reference Regulatory Notice 11-54)
    - Tailored and scheduled in a risk based manner
    - Corrective action
    - Quality control
  - Inspection Scope
    - Identify other risks (e.g., OBAs, PSTs, cybersecurity, other undisclosed activities)
    - Investigate known risks
    - Confirm status of known activities
  - Conflicts of Interest
    - Mitigating conflicts of inspectors/auditors

Regulatory Notice 11-54

Branch Office Inspections

FINRA and the SEC Issue Joint Guidance on Effective Policies and Procedures for Broker-Dealer Branch Inspections

November 2011

Executive Summary

FINRA and the Securities and Exchange Commission's Office of Compliance Inspections and Examinations are issuing the attached National Exam Risk Alert to provide broker-dealer firms with information on developing effective policies and procedures for branch office inspections. The Alert reminds firms of supervisory requirements under FINRA's supervision rule and notes common deficiencies and strong compliance practices.

Questions concerning this *Notice* should be directed to:

- Michael Rufino, Chief Operating Officer, Member Regulation Sales Practice, at (212) 858-4487; or
- George Walz, Vice President, Office of Risk, at (202) 728- 8211.

Notice Type

- Guidance

Suggested Routing

- Compliance
- Internal Audit
- Risk
- Senior Management

Key Topics

- Branch Office Inspections
- Risk Management
- Supervision

Referenced Rules & Notices

- NASD Rule 3010
- NTM 98-96
- NTM 99-45

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National Examination Risk Alert

By the Office of Compliance Inspections and Examinations

in cooperation with the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority [1]

Information for Managers and Chief Compliance Officers

Volume I, Issue 2 **November 30, 2011**

In this Alert:

Topic: *Broker-dealer branch inspections*

Objectives: *Encourage firms to create effective policies and procedures for their branch inspections.*

Key Takeaways:

A broker-dealer's branch inspection program is a key part of its supervisory system.

Exam staff have found a number of deficiencies in branch inspections conducted by firms.

This Risk Alert presents a joint report by OCIE staff and FINRA staff, highlighting a number of practices that examiners have observed that are found in effective branch office supervisory systems.

Broker-Dealer Branch Inspections

The branch inspection process is a critical component of a comprehensive risk management program and can help protect investors and the interests of the firm. OCIE and FINRA examination staff have observed that firms that execute this process well typically:

- tailor the focus of branch exams to the business conducted in that branch and assess the risks specific to that business;
- schedule the frequency and intensity of exams based on underlying risk, rather than on an arbitrary cycle, but examine branch offices at least annually;
- engage in a significant percentage of unannounced exams, selected through a combination of risk based analysis and random selection;
- deploy sufficiently senior branch office examiners who understand the business and have the gravitas to challenge assumptions; and
- design procedures to avoid conflicts of interest by examiners that may serve to undermine complete and effective inspection.

[1] The Securities and Exchange Commission ("SEC"), as a matter of policy, disclaims responsibility for any private publication or statement by any of its employees. The views expressed herein are those of the staff of the Office of Compliance Inspections and Examinations ("OCIE") in coordination with other SEC staff, including in the Division of Trading and Markets, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Commission or the other staff members of the SEC. This document was prepared by OCIE staff in consultation with the staff of the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority ("FINRA") and is not legal advice.

Conversely, firms with significant deficiencies in the integrity of their overall branch inspection process, typically:

- utilize generic examination procedures for all branch offices, regardless of business mix and underlying risk;
- try to leverage novice or unseasoned branch office examiners who do not have significant depth of experience or understanding of the business to challenge assumptions;
- perform the inspection in a "check the box" fashion without questioning critically the integrity of underlying control environments and their effect on risk exposure;
- devote minimal time to each exam and little, if any, resources to reviewing the effectiveness of the branch office exam program;
- fail to follow the firm's own policies and procedures by not inspecting branch offices as required, announcing exams that were supposed to be unannounced, or failing to generate a written inspection report that included the testing and verification of the firm's policies and procedures, including supervisory policies and procedures;
- fail to have adequate policies and procedures, particularly in firms that use an independent contractor model and that allow registered personnel to also conduct business away from the firm; and
- lack heightened supervision of individuals with disciplinary histories or individuals previously associated with a firm with a disciplinary history.

A well-designed branch inspection program is both: (1) a necessary element (but not the only element) of a firm's compliance and reasonable supervision of its branch offices and branch office personnel under Section 15(b)(4)(E) of the Securities Exchange Act as well as FINRA rules; and (2) an integral component of the firm's risk management program. The branch inspection provides the firm with the opportunity to validate its surveillance results from branch offices and to gather on-site intelligence that supplements the ongoing management and surveillance of the branch from a business and risk management standpoint.

Risk-Based Inspections

An effective risk assessment process will help drive the frequency, intensity and focus of branch office inspections; it should also serve as an important consideration in the decision to conduct the exam on an announced or unannounced basis. Therefore, branch offices should be continuously monitored with respect to changes in the overall business, products, people and practices. Branch inspections should be conducted by persons that have sufficient knowledge and experience to evaluate the activities of the branch, and should be overseen by senior personnel such as the CCO or other knowledgeable principal. Further, procedures should be designed to avoid conflicts of interest that may serve to undermine complete and effective inspections because of the economic, commercial or financial interests that an examiner holds in the associated person or branch being inspected.

Branch office inspections provide an opportunity for oversight that should enhance the firm's routine surveillance and supervisory activities. For instance, branch office inspections may allow a firm to better identify the nature and extent of outside business activities of registered branch office personnel. Outside business activities conducted by registered persons may carry added risk because these activities may be perceived by customers as part of the member's business. Confirming that the scope of outside business activities of registered branch office personnel

conform to those activities authorized by the firm is an important component of the branch office inspection, and addresses a risk that may be more difficult to monitor. For much the same reasons, unannounced inspections (which do not provide an opportunity to hide, alter or destroy documentation or other information reflecting such activities) are a critical element of any well designed branch office inspection program and should constitute a significant percentage of all exams conducted.

This ongoing risk analysis should be a key element of the firm's exam planning process and lead to more frequent examinations of offices posing higher levels of risk than dictated by the firm's non-risk based cycle, and lead firms to engage in more unannounced exams of such offices. Some areas of high risk to consider are: sales of structured products; sales of complex products, including variable annuities; sales of private or otherwise unregistered offerings of any type; or offices that associate with individuals with a disciplinary history or that previously worked at a firm with a disciplinary history. NASD IM-3010-1 also lists additional factors to consider in making this determination.

Pursuant to NASD Rule 3010(c)(2), each branch office inspection must include a written report that includes, at a minimum, testing and verification of the firm's policies and procedures in specified areas. As discussed further below, it is a good practice for this report to note any deficiencies and areas of improvement, as well as outline agreed-upon actions, including timelines, to correct the identified deficiencies.

Oversight of Branch Office Inspections

A broker-dealer's internal branch inspection program is a necessary part of its supervisory system and a strong indicator of a firm's culture of compliance. To test the quality of broker-dealers' required inspections of branch offices, SEC and FINRA examiners may seek to review and verify items related to an effective branch examination program, particularly matters such as supervisory procedures regarding customer accounts and sales of retail products. For example, examiners may review the following:

- policies and procedures, including supervisory procedures as they pertain to the supervision of customer accounts, including those serviced by income producing managers;
- policies and procedures relating to the handling of money and securities physically received at the branch;
- validation of changes in customer addresses and other account information in accounts serviced by the branch;
- procedures related to transmittals of funds between customers and third parties, and between customers and registered representatives ("RRs");
- firm testing of policies and procedures related to specific retail products, including:
    - sales of structured products;
    - private and other unregistered offerings;
    - municipal securities;
    - mutual funds; and
    - variable annuity sales and exchanges;
- firm testing in retail sales practice areas, including:

    - verification of customer account information;
    - supervision of customer accounts;
    - written supervisory procedures ("WSPs");
    - new account review, suitability of investments;
    - unauthorized trading;
    - churning;
    - allocations of new issues;
    - licensing; and
    - training;
- advertising and other communications with the public or with customers (such as email and other written correspondence) and compliance with approval procedures;
- evidence of unreported outside or other unauthorized business activities by review of: customer files, written materials on the premises and at any satellite locations, branch office accounting records, appointment books and calendars, phone records, bank records;
- procedures for handling of customer complaints;
- risk-based reviews of bank accounts of the branch and affiliated entities, third-party wire transfers, and branch signature guarantee log; and
- procedures to uncover use of unauthorized computers or other electronic devices and/or social media.

Requirements and Guidance Pertaining to Broker-Dealer Branch Inspections

The responsibility of broker-dealers to supervise their associated persons is a critical component of the federal regulatory scheme. Sections 15(b)(4)(E) and 15(b)(6)(A) of the Exchange Act authorize the Commission to impose sanctions on a firm or any person that fails to reasonably supervise someone that is subject to the supervision of such firm or person who violates the federal securities laws. In order to defend such a charge, a broker-dealer could show that it has established procedures that would reasonably be expected to prevent and detect a violation by such other person, and has a system for applying such procedures that has been effectively implemented. Such a system must be designed in such a way that it could reasonably be expected to prevent and detect, insofar as practicable, securities law violations.

The staff of the SEC's Division of Trading and Markets (formerly known as the Division of Market Regulation) has noted that an effective branch office inspection program is a vital component of a supervisory system reasonably designed to oversee activities at remote branch offices.[2] A number of Commission decisions in the area, both settled and litigated, set forth principles that can guide firms in constructing an effective branch office inspection program.[3] Those cases suggest that regular branch office inspections over reasonably short intervals, including unannounced inspections, are the cornerstone of a well designed branch office

[2] Staff Legal Bulletin No. 17, Remote Office Supervision (March 19, 2004) ("SLB 17").

[3] *See, e.g., Consolidated Investment Services, Inc*., Rel. No. 34-36687(Jan. 5, 1996) (where the Commission notes that: "We also agree with the law judge that surprise inspections of [the branch office] would have been a prudent course of action;" *Signal Securities, Inc.,,* Rel. No. 34-43350 (Sep. 26, 2000) ()(citing Consolidated Investment Services); and *Quest Capital Strategies,* Rel. No. 34-44935 (Oct. 15, 2001) ()(where the Commission stated that : "A surprise inspection is a compliance tool that is necessarily available to every securities firm in carrying out its supervisory responsibilities."); *Royal Alliance Associates, Inc.,* Rel. No. 34-38174 (Jan. 15, 1997) ()(settled matter); *see also* SLB 17.

inspection program.[4] The Commission has sanctioned firms that have not conducted unannounced examinations of their branch offices. [5] Where a firm only conducts pre-announced examinations, that could create opportunities for branch office personnel to alter or destroy, documents, or commit other securities law violations, resulting in major fines for the firm.[6] As a result, OCIE and FINRA staff believe that a well-constructed branch office inspection program should include unannounced inspections, based on a combination of random selection, risk-based selection and for cause exams.

Beyond the timing and nature of the inspections, OCIE and FINRA staff also believe that past guidance suggests that a well-constructed branch office supervisory program should include: procedures for heightened supervision of remote branch offices that have associated persons with disciplinary histories; independent verification of the nature and extent of outside business activities; senior management's involvement in assuring that adequate procedures are in place and that sufficient resources are devoted to implementing those procedures; periodic reassessment of supervisory responsibilities ; adequate delineation of supervisory responsibilities; periodic reassessment of supervisory responsibilities; thorough investigation and documentation of customer complaints; and a system of follow up and review of those and other red flags.[7]

FINRA rules and rule interpretations provide additional requirements and guidance in the area. NASD Rule 3010(b) requires every member broker-dealer to establish, maintain and enforce written procedures to supervise the types of business in which it engages and to supervise the activities of RRs, registered principals, and other associated persons that are reasonably designed to achieve compliance with applicable securities laws and regulations, and with the applicable FINRA rules.

Notice to Members 99-45 instructs broker-dealers to adopt and implement a supervisory system that is "tailored specifically to the member's business and must address the activities of all its registered representatives and associated persons."[8] Procedures that merely recite the applicable rules or fail to describe the steps the firm will take to determine compliance with applicable securities laws and regulations are not reasonable.[9] A broker-dealer's procedures should instruct the supervisor on the requirements needed to be in compliance with the regulations.[10] The

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4 *See, e.g., Consolidated Investment Services, Inc*., Rel. No. 34-36687(Jan.5, 1996); *Signal Securities, Inc.,* Rel. No. 34-43350 (Sep. 26, 2000); *Quest Capital Strategies,* Rel. No. 34-44935 (Oct. 15, 2001).

5 *See, e.g., Quest Capital Strategies, Inc*., Rel. No. 34-44935 (Oct. 15, 2001) *and NYLIFE Securities Inc.,* Rel. No. 34-40459 (September 23, 1998) (settled matter).

6 *See, e.g., Fidelity Brokerage Services, LLC*, Rel. No. 34-50138 (Aug. 3, 2004) (pre-announced inspections resulted in, among other things, employees altering and destroying documents; sanctions included a $1,000,000 fine payable to the SEC, plus a $1,000,000 fine payable to the NYSE) (settled matter).

7 *See, e.g., Prospera Financial Services*, Admin. Pro. File No. 3-10306, Rel. No. 34-43352 (September 26, 2000) (settled matter) for a discussion of the above elements of a branch office supervisory program; *see also* SLB 17 for further discussion of these and other elements of an effective branch office supervisory system. *See also* NASD IM-3010-1 (Standards for Reasonable Review).

8 *NASD Notice to Members 99-45 (June 1999) at* 294.

9 *Id*. at 295. See also *NASD Notice to Members 98-96* (Dec. 1998).

10 *NASD Notice to Members 99-45* (June 1999) at 293-94 (giving examples of situations in which "written supervisory procedures would instruct the supervisor" in how to document compliance)..

procedures should describe the activities the supervisor will conduct along with the frequency as to when the reviews will be conducted.[11]

NASD Rule 3010(c)(1) requires each member to conduct a review, at least annually, of the businesses in which it engages. A broker-dealer must conduct on-site inspections of each of its office locations; Office of Supervisory Jurisdictions ("OSJs")[12] and non-OSJ branches that supervise non-branch locations at least annually, all non-supervising branch offices at least every three years; and non-branch offices periodically. For these other branch offices, firms should consider whether a cycle of less than three years would be more appropriate, using factors such as the nature and complexity of the branch's securities business, the volume of business done, and the number of associated persons assigned to each branch.[13] Pursuant to NASD Rule 3010(c)(1), broker-dealers must document the examination schedules for each non-supervisory branch and non-branch office in their WSPs, including a description of the factors used to determine the examination cycle for such locations. The rule also requires broker-dealers to record the dates each inspection was conducted.[14]

Pursuant to NASD Rule 3010(c)(2) the reports reflecting these reviews and inspections must be kept on file by the broker-dealer for a minimum of three years. NASD Rule 3010(c)(3) generally prohibits a branch office manager or any other person within the office with supervisory duties (or any person supervised by such person) from conducting an inspection of the office.[15]

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11 *Id*.

12 An OSJ is defined under NASD Rule 3010(g) as any office of a member at which any one or more of the following functions take place: (a) order execution and/or market making; (b) structuring of public offerings or private placements; (c) maintaining custody of customers' funds and/or securities; (d) final acceptance (approval) of new accounts; (e) review and endorsement of customer orders; (f) final approval of advertising or sales literature, except for an office that solely conducts final approval of research reports; or, (g) responsibility for supervising the activities of associated persons at one or more other branch offices.

13 NASD Rule 3010(c)(1)(B).

14 NASD Rule 3010(c), which governs "Internal Inspections," requires that each broker-dealer review the activities of each of its offices including the periodic examination of customer accounts to detect and prevent irregularities or abuses. The rule also requires that the written inspection report include, without limitation, the testing and verification of the member's policies and procedures, including supervisory policies and procedures in the following areas:

- Safeguarding of customer funds and securities;
- Maintaining books and records;
- Supervision of customer accounts serviced by branch office managers;
- Transmittal of funds between customers and RRs and between customers and third parties;
- Validation of customer address changes; and
- Validation of changes in customer account information.

15 However, the rule provides an exception from this requirement for a firm so limited in size and resources that it cannot otherwise comply. Under NASD Rule 3010(c)(3) the basis for this exception must be documented in the report for each inspection conducted in reliance on the exception.

Review of Effective Practices

As noted throughout this Risk Alert, SEC and FINRA examiners have identified some practices that are characteristic of many effective supervisory procedures and effective branch office supervisory systems.[16] Such practices are consolidated here:

- Using risk analysis to identify whether individual non-supervising branches should be inspected more frequently than the FINRA-required minimum three-year cycle. Branches that meet certain risk criteria based on risk ratings are inspected more often. In addition, some firms conduct "re-audits" more frequently than required when routine inspections reveal a higher than normal number of deficiencies, repeat deficiencies or serious deficiencies. Typically, these re-audits and audits for cause are unannounced inspections.
- Using surveillance reports, employing current technology and techniques as appropriate, to help identify risk and develop a customized approach for the firm's compliance program and branch office inspections that considers the type of business conducted at each branch.
- Employing comprehensive checklists that incorporate previous inspection findings and trends from internal reports such as audit reports.
- Conducting unannounced branch inspections. Firms elected to conduct unannounced examinations either randomly or based on certain risk factors. These "surprise" exams may yield a more realistic picture of a broker-dealer's supervisory system, as it reduces the risk that individual RRs and principals might attempt to falsify, conceal or destroy records in anticipation for an internal inspection.
- Including in the written report of each branch inspection any noted deficiencies and areas of improvement. The report should also outline agreed upon actions, including timelines, to correct the identified deficiencies.
- Using examiners with sufficient experience to understand the business being conducted at the particular branch being examined and the gravitas to challenge assumptions.
- Designing procedures to avoid conflicts of interest by examiners that may serve to undermine complete and effective inspection.
- Involving qualified senior personnel in several branch office examinations per year.
- Incorporating findings on results of branch office inspections into appropriate management information or risk management systems; and using a compliance database that enables compliance personnel in various offices to have centralized access to comprehensive information about all of the firm's RRs and their business activities. Such a system appears to be highly useful to the compliance personnel at the OSJ and elsewhere for quickly accessing information and for supervising independent contractor RRs dispersed across a broad geographic area.
- Providing branch office managers with the firm's internal inspection findings and requiring them to take and document corrective action.

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[16] Firms are encouraged to consider the practices described herein in assessing their own procedures and implementing improvements that will best protect their clients. Firms are cautioned that these factors and suggestions are not exhaustive, and they constitute neither a safe harbor nor a "checklist" for SEC staff examiners. Other practices besides those highlighted here may be appropriate as alternatives or supplements to these practices. While some of the effective practices above are existing regulatory requirements, the adequacy of a supervisory program can be determined only with reference to the profile of the specific firm and the specific facts and circumstances.

- Tracking corrective action taken by each branch office manager in response to branch audit findings.
- Elevating the frequency and/or scope of branch inspections where registered personnel are allowed to conduct business activities other than as associated persons of a broker-dealer, for example away from the firm.

Conclusion

This alert reminds broker-dealers that their branch office inspections must be conducted with vigilance. It describes certain supervisory tools that, based on OCIE and FINRA staff examinations and Commission enforcement cases, are characteristic of good supervisory procedures for branch office inspections, including the use of unannounced onsite inspections. While this alert summarizes recognized precedent and standards, and provides OCIE and FINRA staff views with regard to means to enhance branch inspections, it does not provide an exhaustive list of steps to effectively discharge responsibilities. A well-designed branch office inspection program is a necessary element – but not the only element – of reasonable supervision of a firm's branch offices and branch office personnel.

We recognize that each firm is different and that firms need flexibility to adopt procedures to suit their individual structures and business needs. Our suggestions as to compliance methods are not meant to be exclusive or exhaustive and do not constitute a safe harbor. Rather, this report may assist firms in crafting more effective policies and procedures for branch office inspections to prevent and detect misconduct. We urge firms to review their policies and procedures in this regard to determine if they are reasonably designed to prevent and detect violations of applicable law and rules.

Regulatory Notice 10-19

Consolidated Reports

FINRA Reminds Firms of Responsibilities When Providing Customers With Consolidated Financial Account Reports

Executive Summary

The practice of providing customers with consolidated financial account reporting has become increasingly common in the financial services industry. In many cases, these reports offer a single document that combines information regarding most or all of the customer's financial holdings, regardless of where those assets are held. Firms are reminded that these reports represent communications with the public by the firm; the dissemination of these reports must comply with all applicable FINRA rules as well as the federal securities laws.

As investor demand for this service has grown and as increasingly sophisticated software and data service providers have become available, firms have developed differing practices for generating these communications. If not rigorously supervised, this activity can raise a number of regulatory concerns, including the potential for communicating inaccurate, confusing or misleading information to customers, lapses in supervisory controls, and the use of these reports for fraudulent or unethical purposes.

This *Notice* reminds firms of their responsibilities to ensure that they comply with all applicable rules when engaging in this activity, and highlights a number of sound practices. Firms are strongly encouraged to review the overall adequacy and effectiveness of their current policies and procedures relating to their consolidated reporting. Any firm that cannot properly supervise the dissemination of consolidated reports by its registered representatives must prohibit the dissemination of those reports and take the necessary steps to ensure that its registered representatives comply with this prohibition.

April 2010

Notice Type

- Guidance

Suggested Routing

- Compliance
- Legal
- Operations
- Registered Representatives
- Senior Management
- Systems
- Training

Key Topics

- Account Statements
- Communications with the Public
- Correspondence
- Internal Controls
- Supervision
- Supervisory Controls Systems

Referenced Rules & Notices

- NASD Rule 2210
- NASD Rule 2340
- NASD Rule 3010
- NASD Rule 3012
- NYSE Rule 342
- NYSE Rule 409
- Regulatory Notice 08-27
- NTM 05-48

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General questions about this *Notice* should be directed to:

- Steve Kasprzak, Associate Director & Principal Counsel, Sales Practice Policy, Member Regulation, at (646) 315-8603; or
- Bill Hayden, Director, Emerging Regulatory Issues, at (202) 728-8860.

For questions about communications with the public, contact Amy Sochard, Director, Programs & Investigations, Advertising Regulation, at (240) 386-4508.

Discussion and Background

Many firms, as a service to their customers, provide documents that consolidate information regarding a customer's various financial holdings.[1] For the purpose of this *Notice* we will refer to this practice and document as "consolidated reporting" and "consolidated reports," respectively. These consolidated reports offer a broad view of customers' investments, may include assets held away from the firm, and may provide not only account balances and valuations, but performance data as well. In many cases these consolidated reports are prepared at the request of the customer, who may also direct which of his or her accounts to include and provide access to data for non-held accounts. These communications may supplement, but do not replace, the customer account statement required pursuant to NASD Rule 2340 and NYSE Rule 409,[2] which is prepared and disseminated to the customer through a separate process. Consolidated reports may not be represented as a substitute for, and must be distinguished from, account statements that are required by rule.

Firms create consolidated reports through fully integrated, in-house data gathering and reporting systems, fully outsourced solutions from third-party vendors,[3] "off-the-shelf" software applications or a combination of these methods. Firms also disseminate these consolidated reports through a variety of means, such as direct mailing to customers, providing access to secure servers via the Internet and hand delivery during face-to-face meetings. The consolidated reports themselves may contain a variety of information and may be produced as a highly customized document created by an individual representative, or as a standardized report created by a firm system. To the extent individual representatives create consolidated reports, firms are required to supervise this activity, and both the firm and the individual representatives are responsible for compliance with all applicable rules.

Consolidated reports are communications with the public. Therefore, they must be clear, accurate and not misleading.[4] For assets held at the firm, this includes providing information, including valuations, that is consistent with the customer's official account statement.[5] For assets held away, this includes, among other things, taking reasonable steps to accurately reproduce information obtained regarding outside accounts and not to include information that is false or misleading.

Consolidated reports, particularly those published on firm letterhead, can create a misconception that the firm produced or verified all of the data, including the valuation of assets held away. Therefore, these reports should be constructed and provided in such a manner that neither customers nor third parties with whom the customer interacts (*e.g.*, banks, mortgage companies, other broker-dealers) are likely to be confused or misled as to the nature of the information presented, or mistake these documents for official account statements regarding the reported assets. The reports should clearly delineate between information regarding assets held on behalf of the customer, which are included on the firm's books and records, and other external accounts or assets.

If a firm is unable to test or otherwise validate data for non-held assets, including valuation information, the firm should clearly and prominently disclose that the information provided for those assets is unverified. In addition, to the extent a consolidated report contains information regarding financial products that are outside a registered representative's area of proficiency, representatives must discuss and present these financial products in a manner that does not mislead customers as to the scope of the representative's financial expertise.[6]

Consolidated reports are also subject to the regulatory requirements regarding supervision and internal controls, records retention, privacy and safeguarding of customer information.[7] Effective firm controls would include procedures to vet and approve consolidated report templates for compliance with regulatory requirements before they are put into production. These reviews can help ensure that any new consolidated report-generating process complies with regulatory requirements and firm policies, and that it is integrated into the firm's supervisory control program. Similar controls should be put in place for any programming that permits customization, as well as any subsequent changes to the approved templates or programming.

The risks associated with a firm's failure to maintain adequate safeguards over the use and dissemination of customer account information are well established. Beyond the obvious concern regarding the use of account information for fraudulent activity, even well-intentioned but incautious consolidated reporting could result in customers being misled or confused. Given the reliance that customers may place on consolidated reports and the potential consequences if these communications contain mistakes or are misused by firm personnel, firms must review their consolidated reporting programs with particular care. The more complex a firm's program for consolidated reporting, the more difficult it may be to conform that reporting to applicable rule requirements. Factors that contribute to program complexity include:

- the production within a firm of a large number of varying types of consolidated reports, especially consolidated reports that are highly customizable;
- reporting on a wide variety of asset classes, especially assets held outside the firm; and
- a decentralized consolidated reporting structure employing multiple reporting systems.[8]

If a firm provides this service to customers, it must ensure that the size and complexity of the consolidated reporting program does not exceed the firm's ability to supervise the activity and to subject it to a rigorous system of internal controls. Any firm that cannot properly supervise the dissemination of consolidated reports by its registered representatives must prohibit the dissemination of those reports and take necessary steps to ensure that its registered representatives comply with this prohibition.

Sound Practices

FINRA encourages firms to consider the practices described below when reviewing their consolidated reporting programs. This *Notice* is not intended to be a comprehensive roadmap for compliance and supervision; rather, it outlines measures that may assist firms in complying with their various supervisory obligations. Firms should consider these practices in assessing their own procedures and in implementing improvements that will best protect their customers. Firms must adopt procedures and controls that are most effective given the firm's size, structure and operations.

1. **Ongoing audits and reviews**

   Due to the potential risks related to consolidated reporting, some firms have incorporated a review of the consolidated reporting process as a standard element in their testing and oversight programs. These firms test for regulatory compliance, data accuracy and adherence to supervisory procedures in audits, branch office reviews and as an ongoing part of their program of internal inspections required by NASD Rule 3010. Some firms require branch offices that produce consolidated reports to obtain an annual third-party audit of the process.

2. **Centralize reporting systems**

   Maintaining multiple consolidated reporting systems can create a patchwork of processes and applications that may be difficult to adequately supervise. Some firms have chosen to centralize their consolidated reporting programs by requiring use of a single firm-wide system. Other firms that allow multiple report-producing systems, subject them to a centralized review and approval process. Participants in this review and approval process may include personnel from information technology, compliance and legal departments.

3. Customer addresses

Some of the stronger programs require that all consolidated reports be mailed centrally using the customer's address of record,[9] and have processes in place that reconcile address information used for account statements and consolidated reports. In the limited circumstances where different addresses are used to deliver customer account statements and consolidated reports, firms should maintain documentation explaining the discrepancy and indicating that the customer was provided notice or acknowledged the differing addresses.[10]

4. Assets held away

Some firms verify, when possible, information pertaining to assets held away. Some of these firms have opted not to include assets in the consolidated report when the firm cannot verify their existence or cannot validate the valuations.

5. Supporting documentation

Some firms maintain supporting documentation for reported assets with the customer file, or otherwise have it available to be reviewed alongside the consolidated report. This documentation may include information regarding source of data and methods used to determine accuracy and asset valuation. The information may be useful in discussing the consolidated reports with customers, in validating the accuracy of consolidated report-generating systems and for internal control/audit testing purposes.

6. Source documents

It is sound practice to encourage customers to review and maintain the original source documents that are integrated into the consolidated report, such as the statements for individual accounts held away from the broker-dealer. Customers may be tempted to disregard these source documents because of the convenience of the consolidated report. However, source documents may contain notices, disclosures and other information important to the customer, and may also serve as a reference should questions arise regarding the accuracy of the information in the consolidated report.

7. Report design

The design and formatting of consolidated reports is important for ensuring information is clearly communicated. In addition to the requirements outlined above, firms are encouraged to include, when applicable, the following disclosures:[11]

- that the consolidated report is provided for informational purposes and as a courtesy to the customer, and may include assets that the firm does not hold on behalf of the customer and which are not included on the firm's books and records;
- the names of the entities providing the source data or holding the assets, their relationship with each other (*e.g.*, parent, subsidiary or affiliated organization) and their respective functions (introducing/carrying brokerage firms, fund distributor, banking/insurance product providers, etc.);
- a statement clearly distinguishing between assets held or categories of assets held by each entity included in the consolidated report;
- the customer's account number and contact information for customer service at each entity included in the consolidated report;
- identify that assets held away may not be covered by SIPC[12]; and
- if the consolidated report provides aggregate values for several different assets, an explanation of how the aggregated values of the different types of assets were arithmetically derived from separate asset totals.

8. Disclosures and attestations

To help ensure that a customer is apprised of the nature of the consolidated reporting process, and to ensure delivery of any disclosures or other pertinent information, firms may consider obtaining the customer's signed acknowledgement that he or she has been provided with the relevant disclosures and understands the nature and limitations of the consolidated reporting process. These disclosures may, for example, be included with applicable communications regarding privacy protections. Firms should consider a means to refresh this notice on a periodic basis.

Endnotes

1 This reporting is most commonly issued by firms that maintain an affiliated investment adviser or by registered representatives who also provide investment advisory services to their customers.

2 The FINRA rulebook currently consists of: (1) FINRA Rules; (2) NASD Rules; and (3) rules incorporated from NYSE (Incorporated NYSE Rules) (together, the NASD Rules and the Incorporated NYSE Rules are referred to as the Transitional Rulebook). While the NASD Rules generally apply to all FINRA member firms, the Incorporated NYSE Rules apply only to those members of FINRA that are also members of the NYSE (Dual Members). The FINRA Rules apply to all FINRA member firms, unless such rules have a more limited application by their terms. For more information about the rulebook consolidation process, *see Information Notice 3/12/08* (Rulebook Consolidation Process). For convenience, the Incorporated NYSE Rules are referred to as the NYSE Rules.

3 Vendors include Web-based application service providers (ASPs) that aggregate financial data and create reports to firm specifications that may be mailed to customers or, if the firm desires, can be accessed on a read-only basis from the ASP's Web server. To the extent that firms rely on third-party vendors, firms are responsible for complying with applicable requirements regarding outsourcing, as discussed in *Notice to Members 05-48*. The *Notice* clarifies firm responsibilities when outsourcing "covered activities," which the *Notice* identifies as activities or functions that, if performed directly by firms, would be required to be the subject of a supervisory system and written supervisory procedures pursuant to NASD Rule 3010.

4 Depending on the form, content and method of dissemination, these consolidated reports may be considered sales literature or correspondence. As such, they may be subject to various requirements outlined in NASD Rules 2210 and 2211 and associated guidance, such as the requirement for clear and prominent display of the firm's name on communications and disclosures related to use of performance information.

5 Inaccuracies may include discrepancies associated with having consolidated reports and customer account statements produced through separate systems or by different entities. For example, firms have reported finding numerous instances in which the same in-house transaction was reflected differently in each document, thereby requiring a correction before publication or dissemination.

6 NASD Rule 2210(d)(1)(A). *See also Regulatory Notice 08-27* (May 2008) (Misleading Communications About Expertise).

7 The better information security programs routinely test controls over access to systems and data related to the reporting process as part of the firm's internal controls regime. Access controls must be rigorously supervised to avoid unauthorized use or manipulation of customer account data.

8 These multi-system situations often arise when a firm affiliates with or acquires a new group of representatives or branch offices that bring with them legacy systems. In some instances, a reporting system may be unique to a single branch office, even to the extent that a single branch may maintain a separate contractual relationship with a third-party vendor to provide these services.

Endnotes continued

9 Firms are required to have procedures to review, monitor and validate customer changes of address. These policies and procedures must include "a means or method of customer confirmation, notification, or follow-up that can be documented." NASD Rule 3012(a)(2)(B) and NYSE Rule 401.

10 This is consistent with NYSE Rule 409(b) and FINRA's proposed rule change to adopt NASD Rule 2340 (Customer Account Statements) as FINRA Rule 2231. Proposed Supplementary Material .01 (Transmission of Customer Account Statements to Other Persons or Entities) would expressly require a firm to obtain written instructions from the customer in order to send/deliver customer statements, confirmations or other communications to other persons or entities. *See* Securities Exchange Act Release No. 59921 (May 14, 2009), 74 FR 23912 (May 21, 2009).

11 These elements are drawn from existing guidance relating to multi-account reporting practices for customer account statements in NYSE Rule Interpretations 409(a)/04 (Assets Externally Held and Included on Statements Solely as a Service to Customers) and (a)/06 (Use of Summary Statements) and are consistent with FINRA's proposed rule change to adopt NASD Rule 2340 (Customer Account Statements) as FINRA Rule 2231. The multi-account reporting guidance in proposed FINRA Rule 2231, Proposed Supplementary Material .04 (Assets Externally Held and Included on Statements Solely as a Service to Customers) and Proposed Supplementary Material .06 (Use of Summary Statements) are substantially unchanged from existing NYSE Rule Interpretations 409(a)/4 and 409(a)/6. *See* Securities Exchange Act Release No. 59921 (May 14, 2009), 74 FR 23912 (May 21, 2009).

12 Firms should consider including a disclosure clarifying that their firm's SIPC coverage would only apply to those assets held at the firm, and to the extent some of the other reported entities may be SIPC members, customers should contact their financial representative or the other entity or refer to the other entity's statement regarding SIPC membership.

NASD Notice to Members 96-33

NASD Clarifies Rules Governing RR/IAs

Suggested Routing

- [x] Senior Management
- [ ] Advertising
- [ ] Corporate Finance
- [ ] Government Securities
- [ ] Institutional
- [x] Internal Audit
- [x] Legal & Compliance
- [ ] Municipal
- [ ] Mutual Fund
- [ ] Operations
- [ ] Options
- [x] Registration
- [ ] Research
- [ ] Syndicate
- [ ] Systems
- [ ] Trading
- [x] Training

Executive Summary

On May 15, 1994, the NASD® issued *Special Notice to Members 94-44*, which clarified the applicability of Article III, Section 40 of the NASD Rules of Fair Practice to investment advisory activities of registered representatives (RRs) who also are investment advisers (RR/IAs). In particular, the Notice addressed the supervision of securities transactions conducted by RR/IAs away from the NASD members with which they are associated. Since the issuance of *Notice to Members 94-44*, the NASD has responded to questions concerning the types of records that may be used and recordkeeping systems that may be established by an NASD member to ensure that investment advisory transactions subject to Article III, Section 40 are properly recorded and the RR/IA adequately supervised. The NASD also has responded to other general compliance and interpretive questions relating to Article III, Section 40. To further facilitate member firm compliance with Article III, Section 40, this Notice discusses recordkeeping approaches and presents the answers to some of the most frequently asked questions regarding Section 40 since the release of *Notice to Members 94-44*.

Questions regarding this Notice may be directed to Daniel M. Sibears, Director, Regulation, at (202) 728-6911; or Mary Revell, Senior Attorney, Regulation, at (202) 728-8203.

Background

As reviewed in *Notice to Members 94-44*, Article III, Section 40 requires that any person associated with an NASD member who participates in a private securities transaction must, before participating in the transaction, provide written notice to the member with which he or she is associated. The written notice must describe the transaction, the associated person's role, and disclose whether the associated person will or may receive selling compensation. Thereafter, the NASD member must advise the individual in writing whether it approves or disapproves the associated person's participation in a private securities transaction. If the member approves the transaction, the transaction must be recorded on the member's books and records, and the member must supervise the associated person's participation as if the transaction were executed on behalf of the member.

Most notably, *Notice to Members 94-44* clarifies the analysis that members must follow to determine whether the activity of an RR/IA falls within the parameters of Section 40. Fundamental to this analysis is whether the RR/IA participates in the execution of a securities transaction such that his or her actions go beyond a mere recommendation, thereby triggering the recordkeeping and supervision requirements of Section 40.

Where the RR/IA does not participate in the execution of securities transactions, *Notice to Members 94-44* reminds members and their RR/IAs that while Section 40 may not apply, the activity, nonetheless, may be subject to the notification provisions of Article III, Section 43. That section requires an RR to provide written notice to the NASD member with which he or she is associated of any proposed employment or outside business activity pursuant to which he or she will receive compensation from others. The form and content of an Article III, Section 43 notice is to be determined by the NASD member.

Article III, Section 40 Books And Records Relating To Investment Advisory Transactions

Where a member has approved an RR/IA's participation in private securities transactions for which he or she

will or may receive selling compensation, the member must develop and maintain a recordkeeping system that, among other things, captures the transactions executed by the RR/IA in its books and records and facilitates supervision over that activity. Recordkeeping systems that simply record all transactions will not result in adequate supervision under Article III, Section 27 of the Rules of Fair Practice. Rather, the records created and recordkeeping system used, together with relevant supervisory procedures, must enable the member to properly supervise the RR/IA by aiding the member's understanding of the nature of the service provided by an RR/IA, the scope of the RR/IA's authority, and the suitability of the transactions.

Since the transactions subject to Section 40 by definition occur at and through another member or directly with a product sponsor, the NASD member licensing the RR/IA is not required to record the activity in the same manner it records transactions executed on behalf of its own firm (i.e., on its purchase and sales blotter). Rather, members may develop and use alternative approaches that meet their specific needs and business practices, such as special blotters, separate Section 40 recordation forms and files, and unit systems, for capturing the RR/IA activity that occurs through other firms. In this regard, Section 40 recordkeeping systems may involve many of the following books and records:

• dated notifications from the RR/IA detailing the services to be performed by the RR/IA and the identity of each RR/IA customer serviced at another firm in a private securities transaction;

• dated responses from the NASD member to the RR/IA acknowledging and approving or disapproving the RR/IA's intended activities;

• a list of RRs who also are IAs;

• a list of RR/IAs approved to engage in private securities transactions;

• a list of RR/IA customers, including those that are customers of both the member firm and the RR/IA, with a cross reference to the RR/IA;

• copies of customer account opening cards to determine, among other things, suitability;

• copies of discretionary account agreements;

• duplicate confirmation statements;

• duplicate customer account statements;

• a correspondence file for RR/IA customers;

• investment advisory agreements between the RR/IA and each advisory client;

• advertising materials and sales literature used by the RR/IA to promote investment advisory services wherein the RR/IA holds himself or herself out as a broker/dealer, complemented by a process that shows whether proper filings have been made at the NASD and whether the RR/IA is using any electronic means, such as the Internet, to advertise services or correspond with customers;

• exception reports, where feasible, based on various occurrences or patterns of specified activity, such as frequency of trading, high compensation arrangements, large numbers of trade corrections, and cancelled trades; and

• supervisory procedures fully responsive to Article III, Section 27 requirements and designed to address Section 40 compliance. The procedures may include such items as the identity of persons responsible for Section 40 compliance, the recordkeeping system to be used and followed, and memoranda or compliance manuals that notify RR/IAs of the member's procedural requirements for Section 40 compliance.

Neither the federal securities laws nor the NASD Rules of Fair Practice mandate the supervisory system or structure that a member must use. Rather, each member can develop and implement its own supervisory system that is reasonably designed to detect and prevent violations. In this regard, no single document or combination of the referenced documents is specifically required or necessarily adequate to comply with Section 40 requirements. Rather, each member that determines to permit its associated persons to transact securities business through another broker/dealer must decide which tailored combination of records is necessary to develop an adequate supervisory system that addresses the allowable activities of RR/IAs. For example, obtaining duplicate confirmation statements directly from the RR/IA alone would permit a member to fulfill recordation requirements for the trades represented by confirmations received, but would not necessarily permit a member to reasonably ensure that it is capturing all trades. However, an arrangement under which the member obtains duplicate confirmation statements directly from the firm (or firms) that executes transactions for the RR/IA should be sufficient to ensure that the member captures all trades.

Member firms have tremendous flexibility to develop and implement recordkeeping and supervisory systems that meet the unique nature and scope of their own operations, and the permitted activities and services provided by their dually registered persons. In all circumstances, however, recordkeeping and supervision

must be adequate to ensure that full and complete transaction information is captured, and be reasonably designed to detect and/or prevent misconduct that could violate the federal securities laws and NASD Rules.

Answers To Frequently Asked Questions Concerning The Application Of Article III, Section 40 To Investment Advisory Activities

Question #1: Does Article III, Section 40 require prior approval of each transaction executed by an RR/IA away from his or her NASD member firm if the compensation received by the RR/IA is not transaction based?

Answer: An RR/IA may be involved in numerous transactions on a daily basis for which he or she receives asset-based or performance-based fees. Requiring prior notice of each trade effected under these conditions may hinder investors from properly receiving the investment advisory services provided by RR/IAs. Accordingly, the Board of Governors, acting on the recommendation of a special Ad Hoc Committee, has interpreted Article III, Section 40 to require prior notice of the investment advisory services that will be provided by the RR/IA for an asset-based or a performance-based fee, rather than prior notice of each trade effected by an RR/IA for a particular customer. This interpretation is intended to vigorously apply the investor protection concepts of Article III, Section 40 to investment advisory activities in a practical manner.

A member must receive prior written notice from an RR/IA requesting approval to conduct investment advisory activities for an asset-based or performance-based fee on behalf of each of his or her advisory clients. This notice must include details such as:

• a declaration that the individual is involved in investment advisory activities;

• the identity of each customer to whom the notice would apply;

• the types of securities activities that may be executed away from the firm;

• a detailed description of the role of the RR/IA in the investment advisory activities and services to be conducted on behalf of each identified customer;

• information regarding the RR/IA's discretionary trading authority, if any;

• compensation arrangements;

• the identity of broker/dealers through which trades away will be executed; and

• customer financial information.

Only after written approval from the NASD member may the RR/IA engage in the disclosed activities. If there is a change in the RR/IA's proposed role or activities for any customer from what the member initially approved, the RR/IA must provide the member with a subsequent written notice that details the changes and requests the member's further approval to conduct advisory activities on behalf of the customer. The employer member must thereafter record subsequent transactions on its books and records and supervise activity in the affected accounts as if it were its own.

Members are reminded, however, that if the RR/IA receives transaction-based compensation, the member's prior approval of each trade is required.

Question #2: Does Article III, Section 40 apply to persons employed by or associated with registered investment advisory firms if such persons are not registered in an individual capacity with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) or various states?

Answer: Yes. Article III, Section 40 of the Rules of Fair Practice applies to all of an associated person's private securities transactions, regardless of whether or not such associated persons are also registered with other regulatory authorities such as the SEC or the states. The reference to registered investment advisers in *Notice to Members 94-44* does not limit the applicability of Article III, Section 40 to only those persons individually registered as such with other regulatory entities. In addition, if the advisory service is not registered with any regulatory agency, a member should ensure that such registration is not required.

Question #3: Is it appropriate for a limited principal (i.e., a Series 26 Investment Company Principal) to supervise Article III, Section 40 transactions in products such as equity securities that are not covered by that registration category?

Answer: Limited principals may not supervise Article III, Section 40 transactions in products not covered by their registration category. Therefore, if a firm only has principals registered in a limited capacity, associated persons engaging in Article III, Section 40 transactions may do so only in products covered by the licenses of the firm's principals.

Question #4: Is it appropriate for a limited representative (i.e., a Series 6 Investment Company Representative) to execute Article III, Section 40 transactions in products such as equity securities that are not covered by that registration category?

Answer: A limited RR who is otherwise in compliance with applicable

federal and state registration requirements, such as the SEC's investment adviser registration requirements, may not execute transactions in securities not covered by his or her NASD registration. Registration with the NASD as a representative subjects an individual to all NASD rules, regulations, and requirements, including qualification requirements. Those rules preclude a limited representative from acting as a representative in any area not covered by his or her registration category. A limited representative who wishes to execute transactions in securities not covered by his or her registration category is required to pass an appropriate qualification exam.

Question #5: If an RR/IA is registered with more than one NASD member, must all members approve, supervise, and record the Article III, Section 40 transactions?

Answer: All members with whom a person is registered are responsible for the registered representative's involvement in Section 40 transactions. Members may develop a detailed, formal allocation arrangement whereby at least one member agrees and is able to provide the supervision and recordkeeping required by Article III, Section 40. However, the other members would be required to take the reasonable steps necessary to ensure that Section 40's recordkeeping and supervisory requirements are being carried out since members cannot delegate, by contract or otherwise, their ultimate responsibility for compliance with regulatory requirements.

Question #6: What is a member's responsibility with regard to supervising Section 40 securities transactions where an advisory client of an RR/IA refuses to provide information to the member, citing the confidentiality of client information provisions of an investment advisory agreement?

Answer: Article III, Section 40, which was adopted in 1985, and its predecessor Interpretation of the Board of Governors have always stipulated that a member that allows an associated person to participate in a Section 40 transaction is responsible for supervising that transaction as if it were its own. If a member determines that in order to meet its supervisory obligations under Section 40, it must have certain information from the customer and if the customer refuses to provide the information, the member should deny the associated person's request who would then be precluded from participating in the Section 40 activity.

Question #7: Are there circumstances under which income received as salary payments may be deemed selling compensation as defined by Article III, Section 40?

Answer: As explained in *Notice to Members 94-44*, selling compensation is broadly defined to include any compensation paid directly or indirectly from whatever source in connection with or as a result of the purchase or sale of a security. If salary payments are direct or indirect compensation for an RR/IA's participation in the execution of securities transactions away from his or her member firm, the salary payments would be deemed "selling compensation," and the activities would be subject to Article III, Section 40.

Question #8: Where investment seminars are conducted by RR/IAs away from their employing NASD member and seminar participants are charged a fee for attendance, would any income derived from the seminar for this investment advisory activity be governed by Article III, Section 40 or Section 43 of the Rules of Fair Practice?

Answer: If an investment seminar itself does not result in the execution of securities transactions, Article III, Section 43 would govern the investment advisory activity. In determining whether Article III, Section 40 applies, the NASD has focused primarily upon the RR/IA's participation in the execution of securities transactions and whether the participation goes beyond a mere recommendation. If after an investment seminar, however, participants decide to engage in securities transactions with the participation of the RR/IA, that subsequent activity and any compensation received in connection therewith would be subject to Section 40.

Question #9: Must a member review performance reports produced by RR/IAs to properly discharge its supervisory responsibilities under Article III, Section 40?

Answer: It has come to the NASD's attention that some RR/IAs use information supplied by the broker/dealer through which they conduct private securities transactions or by the investment advisory service corporations with which they are associated to create performance reports for their advisory clients. These reports may be individualized performance reports that provide customized information for a specific client or standardized performance reports that provide general information to multiple clients. With regard to this practice, members and RR/IAs are cautioned that in creating or recreating performance reports, a risk is taken that calculations for securities transactions may be inaccurate, incomplete, or misleading, thus resulting in material misrepresentations being made or material facts being omitted. NASD member supervisory responsibilities should include a determination as to whether to permit associated persons to develop performance reports for securities transactions. If this activity is permitted, the member firm must review the performance reports.

Standardized reports sent to multiple clients are considered sales literature and must be reviewed by a registered principal at the member firm before distribution by the RR/IA to clients. If the RR/IA uses the same standardized format for different clients, principal approval before use is required only on the performance report prototype. This review must ensure that the reports are accurate, not misleading, or otherwise in violation of NASD or SEC Rules. In particular, members should review the standards set forth in Article III, Section 35 of the NASD Rules governing member communications with the public, as well as applicable SEC regulations.

Individualized performance reports are considered correspondence. As such, review by the member firm before RR/IA distribution to clients is not required. However, the firm must have appropriate procedures in place, as required by Article III, Section 27 of the NASD Rules of Fair Practice, for review and retention of individualized performance reports and other correspondence.

Question #10: Must NASD members that employ RR/IAs provide training to this segment of their associated persons under the Firm Element of the Continuing Education requirements?

Answer: The Firm Element of the Continuing Education requirements (see Schedule C of the NASD By-Laws) is designed to be flexible and to permit firms to develop tailored educational programs based on their business practices and needs. In this regard, each member that permits its associated persons to conduct securities transactions through another firm should assess the need to provide specific Firm Element training with regard to Section 40 requirements. Where the assessment establishes a need for educational initiatives for all or some portion of the covered persons conducting business away from the member, the firm's written training plan should include defined and scheduled Section 40 training for specified individuals.

Although this Notice and previously issued *Notices to Members 91-32* and *94-44* clarify the application of Article III, Section 40 to investment advisory activities, Section 40 has been in effect since November 12, 1985 (see *Notice to Members 85-84*). Accordingly, members and their RR/IAs are expected to be in compliance with Article III, Section 40.

Print

94-44 Board Approves Clarification On Applicability Of Article III, Section 40 Of Rules Of Fair Practice To Investment Advisory Activities Of Registered Representatives

SUGGESTED ROUTING
Senior Management Internal Audit Legal & Compliance Registration Training

Executive Summary

The Board of Governors, acting on the recommendation of a special Ad Hoc Committee, is clarifying the applicability of Article III, Section 40 of the NASD Rules of Fair Practice to the investment advisory activities of registered representatives. This Notice describes those investment advisory activities that constitute private securities transactions within the scope of Article III, Section 40.

Summary Of Article III, Section 40

Article III, Section 40 provides that any person associated with a member who participates in a private securities transaction must, prior to participating in the transaction, provide written notice to the member with which he or she is associated. The required notice must describe the transaction, the associated person's role, and state whether the associated person has received or may receive selling compensation. The member must respond to the notice in writing indicating whether it approves or disapproves the proposed transaction. Where the registered person has received or may receive selling compensation, the member approving the transaction must record the transaction in its books and records and must supervise the registered person's participation in the transaction as if it was the member's own under Article III, Section 27 of the Rules of Fair Practice.

Section 40 defines "private securities transaction" as any securities transaction outside the regular course or scope of an associated person's employment with a member, including, though not limited to, new offerings of securities which are not registered with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

"Selling compensation" is defined as any compensation paid directly or indirectly from whatever source in connection with or as a result of the purchase or sale of a security, including, though not limited to, commissions; finder's fees; securities or rights to acquire securities; rights of participation in profits, tax benefits, or dissolution proceeds, as a general partner or otherwise; or expense reimbursements.

Notice to Members 85-84, which announced the approval of Article III, Section 40, broadly defined the scope of selling compensation and deliberately meant to include the receipt of any item of value received or to be received, directly or indirectly, from the execution of any such securities transaction. The Notice also discussed that Article III, Section 40 was specifically designed to apply to situations where the registered person was acting as a salesperson or in some other capacity.

Background Of The Application Of Section 40 To RR/RIAs

The National Business Conduct Committee (NBCC), at its May 1991 meeting, considered the issue of the applicability of Article III, Section 40 of the Rules of Fair Practice to certain activities of individuals who are registered both as representatives of an NASD member firm and with the SEC as a Registered Investment Adviser ("dually registered person" or "RR/RIA"), and who conduct their investment advisory activities "away from" their NASD member employer. The issue was considered by the NBCC as a result of a number of requests for interpretations relating to programs under which registered representatives directed securities transactions for their investment advisory clients to a broker/dealer other than the firm with which they are registered.

The NBCC concluded that Article III, Section 40, consistent with the policy announced when the section was adopted, applied in such a manner as to cover certain activities of individuals who are registered both as a representative of an NASD member and with the SEC as an investment adviser. The NBCC stated that Section 40 should apply to all investment advisory activities conducted by these dually registered persons that result in the purchase or sale of securities by the associated person's advisory clients, with the exception of their activities on

behalf of the member. The NBCC also determined that the receipt of compensation as a result of investment advisory activities constituted the receipt of selling compensation as defined in Section 40.

The NBCC then issued *Notice to Members 91-32,* explaining its position and soliciting comments on other advisory compensation arrangements, including "wrap" fees, that had not been before the Committee. In response to *Notice to Members 91-32,* the NASD received over 150 comment letters. Few of the letters addressed the NBCC's request for information on other compensation arrangements but rather sought to clarify the NBCC's view on the application of Section 40 to various factual scenarios involving the activities of dually registered persons. After reviewing the comments, the NBCC and the Board appointed an Ad Hoc Committee of the Board to examine this entire area. This special committee met numerous times to review the comment letters, the history and intent of Section 40, and to receive input from various segments of the securities industry, including those most affected by the NBCC's position.

Following extensive discussions and deliberations, the Ad Hoc Committee formulated a clarification which the Board considered and adopted. The following discussion explains the Board's clarification of its position on the scope of transactions that would be deemed to be "for compensation" under Article III, Section 40 with respect to registered representatives/registered investment advisers.

Clarification

In clarifying its previous position in *Notice to Members 91-32,* the Board focused primarily upon the RR/ RIA's participation in the execution of the transaction—meaning participation that goes beyond a mere recommendation. Article III, Section 40, therefore, applies to any transaction in which the dually registered person participated in the execution of the trade.

An example of a RR/RIA clearly participating in the execution of trades is where he or she enters an order on behalf of the customer for particular securities transactions either with a brokerage firm other than the member they are registered with, directly with a mutual fund, or with any other entity, including another adviser, and receives any compensation for the overall advisory services. As a result, the "for compensation" provisions of Article III, Section 40 would apply, thereby requiring the RR/RIA adviser to provide notice to his or her firm and requiring that firm, if it approved the activities, to record the transactions and supervise the conduct of the RR/RIA. The Board has determined to exclude from Section 40 coverage arrangements under which the account is "handed off' to unaffiliated third-party advisers that make all investment decisions. This, and most other advisory activities, would fall under and be subject to the requirements of Article III, Section 43 of the Rules of Fair Practice.

Activities that would fall under either Sections 40 or 43 of the Rules of Fair Practice can be generally categorized as follows:

1. Transactions executed on behalf of the customer in which the RR/RIA participated in the execution would be subject to the full "for compensation" provisions of Section 40, thereby requiring the member to record and supervise the transactions. This would be the case whether the RR/RIA received transactionally related, commission-type compensation, asset-based management fees, wrap fees, hourly, yearly, or per-plan fees, as long as fees paid include execution services by the RR/RIA. Also included are situations where the dually registered person has an arrangement with a third-party money manager to handle the customer's account and the RR/RIA makes individual investment decisions for the client, based on recommendations or alternatives provided by the third-party manager.

2. Only transactions executed on the customer's behalf without any form of compensation would be subject to the "non-compensation" provisions of Section 40. It is unlikely that activity of this sort would exist to any substantial degree outside of a familial type relationship.

3. All other investment advisory activities that do not include the RR/RIA's participation in the execution would be subject to the notification provisions of Article III, Section 43. These activities would include securities transactions executed by customers independently through another broker/dealer or directly with a fund or other entity based on specific recommendations of the dually registered person, timing services where the service makes the investment decision, the utilization of unaffiliated third-party advisers where the RR/RIA does not participate in investment decisions for the client, financial plan creation and other such activities.

Analysis Of Various Scenarios Under The Clarification

The following are issues raised in correspondence from members and the results under this interpretation.

1. A service offered by many discount brokerage firms includes the firm providing "back office" services for the dually registered person which include collection of the asset-based advisory fee. Here, the RR/RIA has opened an account on behalf of a customer and has discretionary authority to execute transactions on the customer's behalf. Under these facts, the "for compensation" of Section 40 would apply.

2. Some RR/RIAs engage in activities limited to the writing of financial plans for a fee which do not include specific securities purchase recommendations or executions. Under this approach, such activities would be governed by Section 43.

3. Some asset management firms offer "wrap fee" programs to registered investment advisers. The "wrap fee" includes a fee for management, accounting, and reporting. This fee is shared with the investment adviser who is also a registered representative. Portfolio transactions are handled through a broker/dealer firm at substantial discounts and are not known to or handled by the RR/RIA. Investment advisers receive a part of the asset management fee only and receive no part of any transaction fee. The adviser is registered with the SEC and any states as necessary. This activity would be subject to Section 43 rather than Section 40 of the Rules of Fair Practice.

4. There are firms offering market timing services where the firm, operating as an independent investment adviser, directs the switches within a family of mutual funds, either load or no-load. There are no transaction charges and the investment adviser, also a registered representative, is not involved in handling switches among funds. The dually registered person does receive some part/percentage of the market timing fee. If the customer or timing firm effects the switches with no involvement by the RR/RIA, this fact pattern would be considered as falling under Section 43.

5. Investment advisers who are also registered representatives often charge an advisory fee to "time" a group of load or no-load mutual funds for clients. This process could also be described as asset allocation or a monitoring service. The exchange of funds is handled directly by the investment adviser with the fund group. This pattern differs from number 4 in that the adviser effects the transactions. These are "for compensation" transactions pursuant to Section 40.

6. There are several firms which provide asset allocation models, software, computer hardware, and direct linkup and execute the transactions as necessary. Each adviser can produce statements for clients based on downloaded information. The RR/RIA receives a portion of the asset-based fee for his or her monitoring of the account. The firm to which the account is referred actually handles all implementation, and the dually registered person has no part in the actual transactions. These third-party arrangements are covered by Section 43.

7. Institutional advisers offer services to individual investment advisers which include permitting the adviser to implement, via computer, purchases and sales in institutional funds. Assets are held at banks and the RR/RIA produces statements and confirms for a client. The RR/RIA also handles the allocation of assets and places transactions. The client can pay one combined fee or two separate fees. One is paid to the mutual fund (internal fee) and the second is paid separately to the dually registered person for handling the account. To the degree that the RR/RIA participates in the execution of the transactions, this would produce a "for compensation" Section 40 result.

8. Investment advisers may advise clients on assets held and transacted at another broker/dealer without being involved in implementation or execution. The RR/RIA may receive copies of statements and charges an advisory fee which is for investment advice and monitoring not related to any transactions in the account. This scenario does not involve either the recommendation or execution of transactions. Since the service is solely advice and monitoring "not related to any transactions in the account," the activities would fall under Section 43.

9. Varying situation number 8, such that the adviser calls the representative of the other broker/dealer to implement or execute transactions but receives no fee or commission for the handling thereof, results in "for compensation" transactions under Section 40.

Members and RR/RIAs are expected to be in compliance with the Board's Interpretation as clarified in this Notice. Those firms and RR/RIAs who have not been operating in accordance with the provisions of *Notice to Members 91-32* must immediately conform their activities in order to ensure compliance with the concepts and requirements that have been clarified in this Notice. NASD district examiners will be closely reviewing for compliance with this Interpretation during the course of their field examinations, and violations will be reviewed by DBCCs for consideration of disciplinary action. This clarification should enhance members' abilities to design internal policies and procedures to protect customers who deal with dually registered persons and to prevent potential violations of NASD rules and regulations, particularly Article III, Section 40 of the Rules of Fair Practice. directed to Daniel Sibears, Director, Any questions or inquiries concerning the applicability of Article in, Section 40 to the activities of RR/RIAs may be directed to Craig Landauer, Associate General Counsel at (202) 728-8291. Questions relating to members' general compliance and recordkeeping responsibilities under Article III, Section 40 may be Regulatory Policy at (202) 7286911.

Session Notes