

**Series of the Trust**

Strategy Shares Nasdaq 7HANDL™ Index ETF

**Nasdaq Ticker Symbol**

HNDL

**STATEMENT OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

This Statement of Additional Information (“SAI”) contains information which may be of interest to investors in Strategy Shares Nasdaq 7HANDL™ Index ETF (the “Fund”), a series of Strategy Shares, but which is not included in the Fund’s prospectus dated September 1, 2024 (the “Prospectus”). This SAI is not a prospectus and is only authorized for distribution when accompanied or preceded by the Prospectus. This SAI should be read together with the Prospectus. The SAI incorporates by reference the audited financial statements and Report of Independent Registered Public Accounting Firm in the Fund’s [Annual Report](#) for the fiscal year ended April 30, 2024. Investors may obtain a free copy of the Prospectus by writing the Trust at Strategy Shares, 36 North New York Avenue, Huntington, NY, or by telephoning toll free 855-4SS-ETFS (855-477-3837). This SAI is also available on the Fund’s website at [www.strategysharesetfs.com](http://www.strategysharesetfs.com).

**September 1, 2024**

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## DEFINITIONS

For convenience, we will use the following defined terms throughout this SAI.

<u>Defined Term</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Advisor	Rational Advisors, Inc.
Authorized Participant	An entity that has entered a Participant Agreement with the Distributor that has been accepted by the Custodian with respect to the offer and sale of the Fund's Creation Units and is either a participant in the CNS System or is a DTC Participant.
Board	Board of Trustees of the Trust.
Business Day	Any day that the Exchange is open for business. As of the date of this SAI, the Exchange observes the following holidays: New Year's Day, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, President's Day (Washington's Birthday), Good Friday, Memorial Day, Juneteenth National Independence Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day.
Citi	Citi Fund Services Ohio, Inc., the financial administrator, fund accountant, and transfer agent of the Trust.
CNS System	Continuous Net Settlement System of the NSCC.
CNS Participant	An entity that participates in the CNS System.
Code	Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended.
Creation Unit	Block of 25,000 Fund shares.
Custodian	Citibank, N.A.
Distributor	Foreside Fund Services, LLC
DTC	Depository Trust Company.
DTC Participant	An entity for which DTC holds securities and which has access to the DTC system.
ETF	Exchange-traded fund.
Exchange	Nasdaq Stock Market
Fund	Strategy Shares Nasdaq 7HANDL™ Index ETF
Independent Trustees	Trustees who are not "interested persons" of the Trust, as defined in the 1940 Act.
Interested Trustees	Trustees who are "interested persons" of the Trust, as defined in the 1940 Act.
NAV	Net asset value.
NRSRO	Nationally Recognized Statistical Ratings Organization such as Moody's Investor Service ("Moody's") or S&P Global Ratings ("S&P").
NSCC	National Securities Clearing Corporation, a clearing agency registered with the SEC.
SEC	U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.
Transfer Agent	Citi.
1933 Act	The Securities Act of 1933, as amended.
1934 Act	The Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended.
1940 Act	The Investment Company Act of 1940, as amended.

## OVERVIEW OF THE TRUST

The Trust was organized on September 7, 2010, as a Delaware statutory trust and is registered under the 1940 Act as an open-end management investment company.

The Declaration of Trust permits the Trust to issue an unlimited number of shares of beneficial interest in one or more series representing interests in separate portfolios of securities. The Declaration of Trust also permits the Trust to offer two or more classes of shares. Currently, the Trust offers its shares in several separate series. The Fund is a diversified exchange-traded series of the Trust. The investment objective of the Fund is to seek investment results that correlate generally, before fees and expenses, to the price and yield performance of the Nasdaq 7HANDL™ Index (the “Underlying Index”). The Fund commenced operations on January 16, 2018. Additional series may be created from time to time.

The Fund only offers, sells, and redeems shares on a continuous basis at NAV in large aggregations or “Creation Units.” The Fund’s shares are not individually redeemable.

Currently, the Fund’s Creation Unit is comprised of 25,000 shares. Under the Declaration of Trust, the Board has the unrestricted right and power to alter the number of shares of the Fund that constitutes a Creation Unit. Therefore, in the event of a termination of the Fund, the Board, in its sole discretion, could determine to permit the Fund’s shares to be individually redeemable. In such circumstances, the Trust might elect to pay cash redemptions to all shareholders with an “in-kind” election for shareholders owning in excess of a certain stated minimum amount.

Generally, each Fund sells and redeems Creation Units on an in-kind basis. Except for the circumstances specified in this SAI (see “Cash Transactions - Generally” and “Custom Transactions,” below), investors will generally be required to purchase Creation Units by making an in-kind deposit of specified instruments (“Deposit Instruments”), and shareholders redeeming their shares will generally receive an in-kind transfer of specified instruments (“Redemption Instruments.”) The names and quantities of the instruments that constitute the Deposit Instruments and the names and quantities of the instruments that constitute the Redemption Instruments will be specified by each Fund each day, and these instruments are referred to, in the case of either a purchase or a redemption, as the “Creation Basket.” If there is a difference between the NAV of a Creation Unit and the aggregate market value of the Creation Basket exchanged for a Creation Unit, the party conveying instruments with the lower value will also pay to the other an amount in cash equal to that difference (“Cash Amount”).

The Fund may impose a transaction fee in connection with the purchase and redemption of its Creation Units. Such fees will be limited in accordance with the requirements of the SEC applicable to management investment companies offering redeemable securities.

Once “created,” the Fund’s shares trade in the secondary market at market prices that change throughout the day.

## EXCHANGE LISTING AND TRADING

Shares of the Fund are approved for listing and trading on the Exchange, subject to notice of issuance, and will be available for purchase and sale through a broker-dealer at market price on each day that the Exchange is open for business. The market price of the Fund’s shares may trade below, at, or above the most recently calculated NAV per share of the Fund. As is the case of other publicly traded securities, your purchase or sale of Fund shares in the secondary market will be subject to brokerage commissions which will be based on negotiated commission rates at customary levels.

There can be no assurance that the requirements of the Exchange necessary to maintain the listing of shares of the Fund will continue to be met. The Exchange maintains certain listing standards and requires listed companies like the Fund to continue to comply with such standards while their shares are available for trading on the Exchange. The Exchange may, but is not required to, remove the shares of the Fund from listing if: (1) following the initial twelve-month period beginning upon the commencement of trading of the shares, there are fewer than 50 beneficial holders of the shares; (2) the Fund is no longer eligible to operate in reliance on Rule 6c-11 under the 1940 Act; (3) the Fund fails to meet certain continued listing standards of the Exchange; or (4) such other event shall occur or condition exists that, in the opinion of the Exchange, makes further dealings on the Exchange inadvisable. In addition, the Exchange will remove the shares from listing and trading upon termination of the Trust or the Fund.

The base and trading currencies of each Fund is the U.S. dollar. The base currency is the currency in which the Fund's NAV is calculated and the trading currency is the currency in which shares of each Fund are listed and traded on the Exchange.

The Trust reserves the right to adjust the share price of each Fund in the future to maintain convenient trading ranges for investors. Any adjustments would be accomplished through stock splits or reverse stock splits, which would have no effect on the net assets of the Fund.

## **INVESTMENT PRACTICES**

The Prospectus discusses the Fund's principal investment strategies. Below you will find more detail about the types of investments and investment practices permitted by each Fund, including those which are not part of the Fund's principal investment strategy. These investment practices affect each Fund directly as well as through the underlying ETFs in which it invests.

### **EQUITY SECURITIES**

Equity securities include both foreign and domestic common stocks, preferred stocks, exchange-traded funds, other business organizations, real estate investment trusts, and other securities which the Advisor believes have equity characteristics.

#### **Common Stock**

Common stock is a type of equity security which represents an ownership interest in a corporation (including real estate investment trusts ("REITs") discussed below) and the right to a portion of the assets of the corporation in the event of liquidation. This right, however, is subordinate to that of preferred stockholders and any creditors, including holders of debt issued by a corporation. Owners of common stock are generally entitled to vote on important matters. A corporation may pay dividends on common stock.

#### **Preferred Stock**

Preferred stock is a type of equity security which represents an ownership interest in a corporation and the right to a portion of the assets of the corporation in the event of a liquidation. This right, however, is subordinate to that of any creditors, including holders of debt issued by the corporation. Owners of preferred stock ordinarily do not have voting rights, but are entitled to dividends at a specified rate if the corporation has the financial ability to pay such dividends.

#### **Exchange-Traded Funds**

ETFs are traded on stock exchanges or on the over-the-counter market at their market price. Certain ETFs track the performance of a designated index or benchmark and invest in the securities comprising that index or benchmark. Other ETFs do not attempt to track the performance of an index and hold portfolio securities that are actively managed by their investment advisor. ETFs generally issue and redeem shares in creation units (large aggregations of shares) at their NAV per share, generally, in exchange for: (1) a portfolio of securities that correspond pro rata to the securities comprising the product's investment portfolio; and (2) a specified amount of cash.

Generally, shares of ETFs are not individually redeemable. To redeem, the Fund must accumulate enough shares to reconstitute a creation unit of the ETF. The liquidity of small holdings of an ETF, therefore, will depend upon the existence of a secondary market.

#### **Interests in Other Business Organizations**

Entities such as limited partnerships, limited liability companies, and companies organized outside the U.S. (see "Foreign Securities" below) may issue securities comparable to common or preferred stock. Limited partnerships are partnerships consisting of one or more general partners, by whom the business is conducted, and one or more limited partners who contribute capital to the partnership. Limited liability companies frequently consist of one or more managing members, by whom the business is conducted, and other members who contribute capital to the company. Limited partners and members of limited liability companies generally are not liable for the debts of the partnership beyond their capital contributions or commitments. Limited partners and non-managing members are not involved in the day-to-day management of the partnership or limited liability company. They receive income and capital gains from the partnership or limited liability company in accordance with the terms established in the partnership or operating agreement. Typical limited partnerships and limited

liability companies are involved in real estate, oil and gas, and equipment leasing, but they also finance movies, research and development, and other projects.

For an organization classified as a partnership under the Code (including most limited partnerships and limited liabilities companies), each item of income, gain, loss, deduction, and credit is not taxed at the partnership level but flows through with the same character to the partners or members. This allows the partnership to avoid double taxation.

A master limited partnership (“MLP”) is a publicly traded limited partnership or limited liability company. MLPs combine the tax advantages of a partnership with the liquidity of a publicly traded security. MLPs must limit their operations to avoid being taxed as corporations under the Code.

## **REITs**

REITs, or real estate investment trusts, are pooled investment vehicles which invest primarily in income producing real estate or real estate related loans or interests. REITs are generally classified as equity REITs, mortgage REITs or a combination of equity and mortgage REITs. Equity REITs invest the majority of their assets directly in real property and derive income primarily from the collection of rents. Equity REITs can also realize capital gains by selling property that has appreciated in value. Mortgage REITs invest the majority of their assets in real estate mortgages and derive income from the collection of interest payments. The real property and mortgages serving as investment vehicles for REITs may be either residential or commercial in nature and may include healthcare facilities. Similar to investment companies, REITs are not taxed on income distributed to shareholders provided they comply with several requirements of the Code. Such tax requirements may limit a REIT’s ability to respond to changes in the commercial real estate market.

## **FIXED INCOME SECURITIES**

Fixed income securities include convertible securities (other than preferred stock), corporate debt securities, money market instruments, U.S. Government securities, and zero-coupon securities, which provide a stream of fixed payments to the holder.

### **Convertible Securities**

Convertible securities include certain fixed income securities that may be exchanged or converted into a predetermined number of shares of an issuer’s underlying common stock at the option of the holder during a specified period. Convertible securities may take the form of convertible preferred stock, convertible bonds or debentures, units consisting of “usable” bonds and warrants, or a combination of the features of several of these securities. The investment characteristics of each convertible security vary widely, which allows convertible securities to be employed for a variety of investment strategies. The Fund will exchange or convert the convertible securities held in its portfolio into shares of the underlying common stock when, in the Advisor’s opinion, the investment characteristics of the underlying common stock will assist the Fund in achieving its investment objective. Otherwise, the Fund may hold or trade convertible securities.

### **Corporate Debt Securities (Including Bonds, Notes, and Debentures)**

Corporate debt includes any obligation of a corporation to repay a borrowed amount at maturity and usually to pay the holder interest at specific intervals. Corporate debt can have a long or short maturity and is often rated by one or more NRSROs. See Appendix 1 to this SAI for a description of these ratings.

The credit risk of an issuer’s debt security may vary based on its priority for repayment. For example, higher ranking (senior) debt securities have a higher priority than lower ranking (subordinated) securities. This means that the issuer might not make payments on subordinated securities while continuing to make payments on senior securities. In addition, in the event of bankruptcy, holders of senior securities may receive amounts otherwise payable to the holders of subordinated securities. Some subordinated securities, such as trust preferred and capital securities notes, also permit the issuer to defer payments under certain circumstances. For example, insurance companies issue securities known as surplus notes that permit the insurance company to defer any payment that would reduce its capital below regulatory requirements.

### **Money Market Instruments**

Except where otherwise noted, the Fund may, pending investment or for liquidity purposes, invest its assets in money market instruments.

**Bank Obligations.** Bank obligations are short-term obligations issued by U.S. and foreign banks, including bankers' acceptances, certificates of deposit, time deposits, and similar securities.

Bankers' acceptances are negotiable drafts or bills of exchange typically drawn by an importer or exporter to pay for specific merchandise that are "accepted" by a bank, meaning, in effect, that the issuing bank unconditionally agrees to pay the face value of the instrument on maturity. Investments in bankers' acceptances will be limited to those guaranteed by domestic and foreign banks having, at the time of investment, total assets of \$1 billion or more (as of the date of the institution's most recently published financial statements).

Certificates of deposit and time deposits represent funds deposited in a commercial bank or a savings and loan association for a definite period of time and earn a specified return.

Investments in certificates of deposit and time deposits may include Eurodollar Certificates of Deposit, which are U.S. dollar denominated certificates of deposit issued by offices of foreign and domestic banks located outside the U.S., Yankee Certificates of Deposit, which are certificates of deposit issued by a U.S. branch of a foreign bank denominated in U.S. dollars and held in the U.S., Eurodollar Time Deposits, which are U.S. dollar denominated deposits in a foreign branch of a U.S. bank or a foreign bank, and Canadian Time Deposits, which are U.S. dollar denominated certificates of deposit issued by Canadian offices of major Canadian banks. All investments in certificates of deposit and time deposits will be limited to those (a) of domestic and foreign banks and savings and loan associations which, at the time of investment, have total assets of \$1 billion or more (as of the date of the institution's most recently published financial statements) or (b) the principal amount of which is insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

**Commercial Paper and Variable Amount Master Demand Notes.** Commercial paper (including Section 4(2) commercial paper) consists of unsecured promissory notes issued by corporations normally having maturities of 270 days or less and rates of return which are fixed. These investments may include Canadian Commercial Paper, which is U.S. dollar denominated commercial paper issued by a Canadian corporation or a Canadian counterpart of a U.S. corporation, and europaper, which is U.S. dollar denominated commercial paper of a foreign issuer.

Variable amount master demand notes are unsecured demand notes that permit the indebtedness thereunder to vary and provide for periodic adjustments in the interest rate according to the terms of the instrument. Because master demand notes are direct lending arrangements between the Fund and the issuer, they are not normally traded. Although there is no secondary market in the notes, the Fund may demand payment of principal and accrued interest at any time. A variable amount master demand note will be deemed to have a maturity equal to the longer of the period of time remaining until the next readjustment of its interest rate or the period of time remaining until the principal amount can be recovered from the issuer through demand.

**Variable Rate Demand Notes.** Variable rate demand notes ("VRDNs") are unsecured, direct lending arrangements between the Fund, as the lender, and a corporation, financial institution, government agency, municipality or other entity.

VRDNs have interest rates which float or which are adjusted at regular intervals ranging from daily to annually. Although VRDNs are not generally traded, the Fund may demand payment of principal and accrued interest according to its arrangement with the borrower (usually upon no more than seven days' notice). VRDNs are, therefore, treated as maturing on the later of the next interest adjustment or the date on which the Fund may next demand payment. Some VRDNs are backed by bank letters of credit.

The Fund may only invest in VRDNs which satisfy its credit requirements for commercial paper.

**Other Money Market Instruments.** These instruments may include: obligations (certificates of deposit, time deposits, bank master notes, and bankers' acceptances) of thrift institutions, and savings and loans, provided that such institutions have total assets of \$1 billion or more as shown on their last published financial statements at the time of investment; short-term corporate obligations rated within the three highest rating categories by an NRSRO (e.g., at least A by S&P or A by Moody's) at the time of investment, or, if not rated, determined by the Advisor to be of comparable quality; general obligations issued by the U.S. Government and backed by its full faith and credit, and obligations issued or guaranteed as to principal and interest by agencies or instrumentalities of the U.S. Government (e.g., obligations issued by Farmers Home Administration, Government National Mortgage Association, Federal Farm Credit Bank, and Federal Housing Administration); receipts, including Treasury Receipts, Treasury Income Growth Receipts, and Certificates of Accrual on Treasuries; repurchase agreements involving such obligations; money market funds, and foreign commercial paper.

## **U.S. Government Securities**

U.S. Government securities are securities that are either issued or guaranteed as to payment of principal and interest by the U.S. Government, its agencies or instrumentalities. U.S. Government securities are limited to: direct obligations of the U.S. Treasury, such as bills, notes, and bonds of the U.S. Treasury, and notes, bonds, and discount notes of U.S. Government agencies or instrumentalities, including certain mortgage securities.

Agency securities are issued or guaranteed by a federal agency or other government sponsored entity (“GSE”) acting under federal authority. Some GSE securities are supported by the full faith and credit of the U.S. Government and some GSE securities are not. GSE securities backed by the full faith and credit of the U.S. Government include securities issued by the Government National Mortgage Association, Small Business Administration, Farm Credit System Financial Assistance Corporation, Farmers Home Administration, Federal Financing Bank, General Services Administration, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Export-Import Bank, Overseas Private Investment Corporation, and Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Bonds.

GSE securities, which not backed by the full faith and credit of the U.S. Government but receive support through federal subsidies, loans or other benefits include securities issued by the Federal Home Loan Bank System, Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation, Federal National Mortgage Association and Tennessee Valley Authority.

Certain other GSE securities are not backed by the full faith and credit of the U.S. Government and have no explicit financial support, including securities issued by the Farm Credit System, Financing Corporation, and Resolution Funding Corporation.

Investors regard agency securities as having low credit risks, but not as low as Treasury securities. The Fund treats mortgage-backed securities guaranteed by a GSE as if issued or guaranteed by a federal agency. Although such a guarantee protects against credit risks, it does not reduce market and prepayment risks.

From time to time uncertainty regarding the status of negotiations in the U.S. Government to increase the statutory debt limit, commonly called the “debt ceiling,” could increase the risk that the U.S. Government may default on payments on certain U.S. Government securities, cause the credit rating of the U.S. Government to be downgraded, increase volatility in the stock and bond markets, result in higher interest rates, reduce prices of U.S. Treasury securities, and/or increase the costs of various kinds of debt. If the Fund holds securities of a U.S. Government-sponsored entity that is negatively impacted by legislative or regulatory action, is unable to meet its obligations, or its creditworthiness declines, the performance of the Fund will be adversely impacted.

## **Zero Coupon Securities**

Zero-coupon securities are debt obligations which are generally issued at a discount, are payable in full at maturity, and do not provide for current payments of interest prior to maturity. Zero-coupon securities usually trade at a deep discount from their face or par value and are subject to greater market value fluctuations from changing interest rates than debt obligations of comparable maturities which make current distributions of interest. As a result, the NAV of shares of the Fund investing in zero-coupon securities may fluctuate over a greater range than shares of other investment companies investing in securities making current distributions of interest and having similar maturities.

Zero-coupon securities may include U.S. Treasury bills issued directly by the U.S. Treasury or other short-term debt obligations, and longer-term bonds or notes and their unmatured interest coupons which have been separated by their holder, typically a custodian bank or investment brokerage firm. A number of securities firms and banks have stripped the interest coupons from the underlying principal (the “corpus”) of U.S. Treasury securities and resold them in custodial receipt programs with a number of different names, including TIGRS and CATS. The underlying U.S. Treasury bonds and notes themselves are held in book-entry form at the Federal Reserve Bank or, in the case of bearer securities (i.e., unregistered securities that are owned ostensibly by the bearer or holder thereof), in trust on behalf of the owners thereof.

In addition, the U.S. Treasury has facilitated transfers of ownership of zero-coupon securities by accounting separately for the beneficial ownership of particular interest coupons and corpus payments on U.S. Treasury securities through the Federal Reserve book-entry record-keeping system. The Federal Reserve program, as established by the U.S. Treasury Department, is known as “STRIPS” or “Separate Trading of Registered Interest and Principal of Securities.” Under the STRIPS program, the Fund will be able to have its beneficial ownership of U.S. Treasury zero-coupon securities recorded directly in the book-entry record-keeping system in lieu of having to hold certificates or other evidence of ownership of the underlying U.S. Treasury securities.



When debt obligations have been stripped of their unmatured interest coupons by the holder, the stripped coupons are sold separately. The principal or corpus is sold at a deep discount because the buyer receives only the right to receive a future fixed payment on the security and does not receive any rights to periodic cash interest payments. Once stripped or separated, the corpus and coupons may be sold separately. Typically, the coupons are sold separately or grouped with other coupons with like maturity dates and sold in such bundled form. Purchasers of stripped obligations acquire, in effect, discount obligations that are economically identical to the zero-coupon securities issued directly by the obligor.

## **FOREIGN SECURITIES (including emerging markets)**

Generally, foreign securities are those securities which are issued by companies organized outside the U.S. and principally traded in foreign markets ("Foreign Companies"). This includes equity and fixed income securities of Foreign Companies and obligations of foreign branches of U.S. banks and foreign or U.S. branches of foreign banks, including European Certificates of Deposit, European Time Deposits, Canadian Time Deposits, Canadian Yankee Bonds, Canadian Certificates of Deposit, investments in Canadian Commercial Paper, and europaper. In addition, the Fund may invest in depositary receipts. The Fund may also invest in securities issued or guaranteed by Foreign Companies or foreign governments, their political subdivisions, agencies or instrumentalities, and obligations of supranational entities such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

Foreign securities are normally denominated and traded in foreign currencies. Although foreign exchange dealers do not charge a fee for currency conversion, they do realize a profit based on the difference (the "spread") between prices at which they buy and sell various currencies. Thus, a dealer may offer to sell a foreign currency to the Fund at one rate, while offering a lesser rate of exchange should the Fund desire to resell that currency to the dealer. For additional information see "Foreign Currency Transactions" above.

The Fund may also invest in securities of emerging markets issuers. A nation's economy that is progressing toward becoming advanced, as shown by some liquidity in local debt and equity markets and the existence of some form of market exchange and regulatory body is considered to be an emerging market.

Emerging markets generally do not have the level of market efficiency and strict standards in accounting and securities regulation to be on par with advanced economies (such as the United States, Europe and Japan), but emerging markets will typically have a physical financial infrastructure including banks, a stock exchange and a unified currency. Emerging markets may be sought by investors for the prospect of high returns, as they often experience faster economic growth as measured by GDP. Investments in emerging markets may involve greater risk due to political instability, domestic infrastructure problems, currency volatility and limited equity opportunities. Also, local stock exchanges may not offer liquid markets for outside investors.

Some emerging markets countries may have fixed or managed currencies that are not free-floating against the U.S. dollar. Further, certain currencies may not be traded internationally. Certain of these currencies have experienced a steady devaluation relative to the U.S. dollar. Any devaluation in the currencies in which the Fund's securities are denominated may have a detrimental impact on the Fund.

The taxation systems at the federal, regional and local levels in developing or emerging market countries may be less transparent and inconsistently enforced, and subject to sudden change. Developing or emerging market countries may also have a higher degree of corruption and fraud than developed market countries, as well as counterparties and financial institutions with less financial sophistication, creditworthiness and/or resources. Emerging markets countries may have less developed legal systems allowing for enforcement of private property rights and/or redress for injuries to private property, such as bankruptcy. The ability to bring and enforce actions in developing or emerging market countries, or to obtain information needed to pursue or enforce such actions, may be limited and shareholder claims may be difficult or impossible to pursue.

Emerging markets countries may also have less stringent regulatory, disclosure, financial reporting, accounting, auditing, and recordkeeping standards than companies in more developed countries and, as a result, the nature and quality of such information may vary. Information about such companies may be less available and reliable and, therefore, the ability to conduct adequate due diligence in developing or emerging markets may be limited which can impede the Fund's ability to evaluate such companies. In addition, certain developing or emerging market countries may impose material limitations on Public Company Accounting Oversight Board ("PCAOB") inspection, investigation and enforcement capabilities which hinder the ability to engage in independent oversight or inspection of accounting firms located in or operating in certain

developing or emerging markets; there is no guarantee that the quality of financial reporting or the audits conducted by audit firms of developing or emerging market issuers meet PCAOB standards.

Some countries with emerging securities markets have experienced substantial, and in some periods, extremely high, rates of inflation for many years. Inflation and rapid fluctuation in inflation rates have had and may continue to have negative effects on the economies and securities markets of certain countries. Moreover, the economies of some countries may differ favorably or unfavorably from the U.S. economy in such respects as rate of growth of gross domestic product, the rate of inflation, capital reinvestment, resource self-sufficiency, number and depth of industries forming the economy's base, governmental controls and investment restrictions that are subject to political change and balance of payments position. Further, there may be greater difficulties or restrictions with respect to investments made in emerging markets countries.

Emerging markets typically have substantially less volume than U.S. markets. In addition, securities in many such markets are less liquid, and their prices often are more volatile, than securities of comparable U.S. companies. Such markets often have different clearance and settlement procedures for securities transactions, and in some markets, there have been times when settlements have been unable to keep pace with the volume of transactions, making it difficult to conduct transactions. Delays in settlement could result in temporary periods when assets may be uninvested. Settlement problems in emerging markets countries also could cause the Fund to miss attractive investment opportunities. Satisfactory custodial services may not be available in some emerging markets countries, which may result in the Fund incurring additional costs and delays in the transportation and custody of such securities. Emerging securities markets may also be subject to unexpected market closures.

For more information regarding the risks associated with investing in emerging markets, please see "Emerging Markets Risk" below.

### **Depository Receipts**

American Depositary Receipts ("ADRs") are securities, typically issued by a U.S. financial institution (a "depository"), that evidence ownership interests in a security or a pool of securities issued by a foreign issuer and deposited with the depository. ADRs include American Depositary Shares and New York Shares. European Depositary Receipts ("EDRs"), which are sometimes referred to as Continental Depositary Receipts ("CDRs"), are securities, typically issued by a non-U.S. financial institution, that evidence ownership interests in a security or a pool of securities issued by either a U.S. or foreign issuer. Global Depositary Receipts ("GDRs") are issued globally and evidence a similar ownership arrangement. Generally, ADRs are designed for trading in the U.S. securities markets, EDRs are designed for trading in European securities markets and GDRs are designed for trading in non-U.S. securities markets. The Fund will only invest in ADRs, EDRs, CDRs, and GDRs available for investment through "sponsored facilities." A sponsored facility is established jointly by the issuer of the security underlying the receipt and a depository.

### **Foreign Government Securities**

Foreign government securities generally consist of fixed income securities supported by national, state or provincial governments or similar political subdivisions. Foreign government securities also include debt obligations of supranational entities, such as international organizations designed or supported by governmental entities to promote economic reconstruction or development, international banking institutions and related government agencies. Examples of these include, but are not limited to, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the "World Bank"), the Asian Development Bank, the European Investment Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank.

Foreign government securities also include fixed income securities of quasi-governmental agencies that are either issued by entities owned by a national, state or equivalent government or are obligations of a political unit that are not backed by the national government's full faith and credit.

### **Foreign Currency Transactions**

Foreign currency transactions include purchasing and selling foreign currencies, entering into forward or futures contracts to purchase or sell foreign currencies (see "Forward Foreign Currency Contracts and Foreign Currency Futures Contracts," below), and purchasing and selling options on foreign currencies (see "Foreign Currency Options," below). Foreign currency transactions may be used to hedge against uncertainty in the level of future foreign currency exchange rates and to increase current return.

Purchases and sales of foreign currencies on a spot basis are used to increase current return. They are also used in connection with both “transaction hedging” and “position hedging.”

Transaction hedging involves entering into foreign currency transactions with respect to specific receivables or payables generally arising in connection with the purchase or sale of portfolio securities. Transaction hedging is used to “lock in” the U.S. dollar price of a security to be purchased or sold, or the U.S. dollar equivalent of a dividend or interest payment in a foreign currency. The goal is to protect against a possible loss resulting from an adverse change in the relationship between the U.S. dollar and the applicable foreign currency during the period between the date on which the security is purchased or sold or on which the dividend or interest payment is declared, and the date on which such payments are made or received.

Position hedging involves entering into foreign currency transactions either to protect against: (1) a decline in the value of a foreign currency in which a security held or to be sold is denominated; or (2) an increase in the value of a foreign currency in which a security to be purchased is denominated. In connection with position hedging, the Fund may purchase put or call options on foreign currency and foreign currency futures contracts and buy or sell forward contracts and foreign currency futures contracts.

Neither transaction nor position hedging eliminates fluctuations in the underlying prices of the securities that the Fund owns or intends to purchase or sell. They simply establish a rate of exchange that can be achieved at some future point in time. Additionally, although these techniques tend to minimize the risk of loss due to a decline in the value of the hedged currency, they also tend to limit any potential gain that might result from the increase in the value of such currency.

Hedging transactions are subject to correlation risk due to the fact that the amounts of foreign currency exchange transactions and the value of the portfolio securities involved will not generally be perfectly matched. This is because the future value of such securities in foreign currencies will change as a consequence of market movements in the values of those securities between the dates the currency exchange transactions are entered into and the dates they mature.

## **DERIVATIVE CONTRACTS**

Derivative contracts are financial instruments that require payments based upon changes in the values of designated (or underlying) securities, currencies, commodities, financial indices or other assets. Some derivative contracts (such as futures, forwards and options) require payments relating to a future trade involving the underlying asset. Other derivative contracts (such as swaps) require payments relating to the income or returns from the underlying asset. The other party to a derivative contract is referred to as a counterparty.

Depending upon how the Fund uses derivative contracts and the relationships between the market value of a derivative contract and the underlying asset, derivative contracts may increase or decrease the Fund’s exposure to interest rate and currency risks, and may also expose the Fund to liquidity and leverage risks. Over-the-counter (“OTC”) contracts also expose the Fund to credit risks in the event that a counterparty defaults on the contract.

### **Options on Equities, Fixed Income Securities, and Stock Indices**

A call option gives the purchaser of the option the right to buy a security at a stated price from the writer (seller) of the option. A put option gives the purchaser of the option the right to sell a security at a stated price to the writer of the option. In a covered call option and during the option period, the writer owns the security (or a comparable security sufficient to satisfy securities exchange requirements) which may be sold pursuant to the option. In a covered put option, the writer holds cash and/or short-term debt instruments in an amount equal to the exercise price of the option. In addition, a call or put will be considered covered if and to the extent that some or all of the risk of the option has been offset by another position. The Fund may write combinations of covered puts and calls on the same underlying security. In general, the Fund may write options in an attempt to increase returns or purchase options for hedging purposes.

The premium received from writing a put or call option increases the Fund’s return on the underlying security in the event that the option expires unexercised or is closed out at a profit. The amount of the premium reflects, among other things, the relationship between the exercise price and the current market value of the underlying security, the volatility of the underlying security, the amount of time remaining until expiration, current interest rates, and the effect of supply and demand in the options market and in the market for the underlying security. A put option locks in the price at which the Fund may sell a security it holds, thus hedging against market declines. Such protection is provided during the life of the put option since the Fund, as holder of the option, is able to sell the underlying security at the option’s exercise price regardless of any decline in

the underlying security's market price. A call option locks in the price at which the Fund may purchase a security, thus hedging against an increase in the market price of a security.

By writing a call option, the Fund limits its opportunity to profit from any increase in the market value of the underlying security above the exercise price of the option but continues to bear the risk of a decline in the value of the underlying security. By writing a put option, the Fund assumes the risk that it may be required to purchase the underlying security for an exercise price higher than its then current market value, resulting in a potential capital loss unless the security subsequently appreciates in value.

The Fund may terminate an option that it has written prior to its expiration by entering into a closing purchase transaction, in which it purchases an offsetting option. The Fund realizes a profit or loss from a closing transaction if the cost of the transaction (option premium plus transaction costs) is less or more than the premium received from writing the option. Because increases in the market price of a call option generally reflect increases in the market price of the security underlying the option, any loss resulting from a closing purchase transaction may be offset in whole or in part by unrealized appreciation of the underlying security owned by the Fund.

In order for a put option to be profitable, the value of the underlying security/index must decline sufficiently below the exercise price to cover the premium and transaction costs. By using put options in this manner, the Fund will reduce any profit it might otherwise have realized from appreciation of the underlying security/index by the premium paid for the put option and by transaction costs.

In order for a call option to be profitable, the market price of the underlying security/index must rise sufficiently above the exercise price to cover the premium and transaction costs.

The Fund may only write covered call and put options.

The successful use of options depends on the ability of the Advisor to forecast interest rate and market movements. For example, if the Fund were to write a call option based on the Advisor's expectation that the price of the underlying security will fall, but the price rises instead, the Fund could be required to sell the security upon exercise at a price below the current market price. Similarly, if the Fund were to write a put option based on the Advisor's expectations that the value of the underlying security will rise, but the price falls instead, the Fund could be required to purchase the security upon exercise at a price higher than the current market price.

### **Foreign Currency Options**

Options on foreign currencies operate similarly to options on securities and are traded primarily in the over-the-counter market ("OTC options"), although options on foreign currencies may also be listed on several exchanges. Options will be purchased or written only when the Advisor believes that a liquid secondary market exists for such options. There can be no assurance that a liquid secondary market will exist for a particular option at any specific time. Options on foreign currencies are affected by all of those factors which influence exchange rates and investments generally.

Purchases and sales of options may be used to increase current return. They are also used in connection with hedging transactions. (See "Foreign Currency Transactions," above).

Writing covered call options on currencies may offset some of the costs of hedging against fluctuations in currency exchange rates. For transaction hedging purposes the Fund may also purchase exchange-listed and OTC put and call options on foreign currency futures contracts and on foreign currencies. A put option on a futures contract gives the Fund the right to assume a short position in the futures contract until expiration of the option. A call option on a futures contract gives the Fund the right to assume a long position in the futures contract until the expiration of the option.

The value of a foreign currency option is dependent upon the value of the foreign currency and the U.S. dollar, and may have no relationship to the investment merits of a foreign security. Because foreign currency transactions occurring in the interbank market involve substantially larger amounts than those that may be involved in the use of foreign currency options, investors may be disadvantaged by having to deal in an odd lot market (generally consisting of transactions of less than \$1 million) for the underlying foreign currencies at prices that are less favorable than for round lots.

There is no systematic reporting of last sale information for foreign currencies and there is no regulatory requirement that quotations available through dealers or other market sources be firm or revised on a timely basis. Available quotation

information is generally representative of very large transactions in the interbank market and thus may not reflect relatively smaller transactions (less than \$1 million) where rates may be less favorable. The interbank market in foreign currencies is a global, around-the-clock market. To the extent that the U.S. options markets are closed while the markets for the underlying currencies remain open, significant price and rate movements may take place in the underlying markets that cannot be reflected in the U.S. options markets. Options contracts are generally valued at the mean of the bid and asked price as reported on the highest-volume exchange (in terms of the number of option contracts traded for that issue) on which such options are traded.

### **Futures Contracts and Options on Futures Contracts**

A futures contract is a binding contractual commitment which, if held to maturity, will result in an obligation to make or accept delivery of a security at a specified future time and price. By purchasing futures (assuming a “long” position), the Fund will legally obligate itself to accept the future delivery of the underlying security and pay the agreed price. By selling futures (assuming a “short” position), it will legally obligate itself to make the future delivery of the security against payment of the agreed price. Open futures positions on underlying securities generally will be valued at the most recent settlement price. Positions taken in the futures markets are not normally held to maturity, but are instead liquidated through offsetting transactions which may result in a profit or a loss. While futures positions taken by the Fund will usually be liquidated in this manner, the Fund may instead make or take delivery of the underlying securities whenever it appears economically advantageous to the Fund to do so. A clearing corporation associated with the exchange on which futures are traded assumes responsibility for such closing transactions and guarantees that the Fund’s sale and purchase obligations under closed-out positions will be performed at the termination of the contract. Futures contracts are considered to be commodity contracts. The Advisor, on behalf of the Fund, has claimed an exclusion from the definition of the term “commodity pool operator” under the Commodity Exchange Act and, therefore, is not subject to registration or regulation as a commodity pool operator under the Act.

The Fund may purchase and write put and call options on futures contracts, as they become available. Such options are similar to options on securities except that options on futures contracts give the purchaser the right, in return for the premium paid, to assume a position in a futures contract (a long position if the option is a call and a short position if the option is a put) at a specified exercise price at any time during the period of the option. As with options on securities, the holder or writer of an option may terminate its position by selling or purchasing an option of the same series. There is no guarantee that such closing transactions can be effected. The Fund will be required to deposit initial margin and variation margin with respect to put and call options on futures contracts written by it pursuant to brokers’ requirements, and, in addition, net option premiums received will be included as initial margin deposits. See “Margin Payments” below. Compared to the purchase or sale of futures contracts, the purchase of call or put options on futures contracts involves less potential risk to the Fund because the maximum amount at risk is the premium paid for the options plus transactions costs. However, there may be circumstances when the purchases of call or put options on a futures contract would result in a loss to the Fund when the purchase or sale of the futures contracts would not, such as when there is no movement in the prices of debt securities. The writing of a put or call option on a futures contract involves risks similar to those risks relating to the purchase or sale of futures contracts.

Futures contracts and options thereon may also be used for non-hedging purposes, including to seek to increase liquidity, provide efficient portfolio management, broaden investment opportunities, implement a tax or cash management strategy, gain exposure to a particular security or segment of the market, modify the effective duration of the Fund’s portfolio investments and/or enhance total return. However, these instruments are used, their successful use is not assured and will depend upon, among other factors the Advisor’s ability to predict and understand relevant market movements.

**Margin Payments.** When the Fund purchases or sells a futures contract, it is required to deposit with the Custodian an amount of cash, U.S. Treasury bills, or other permissible collateral equal to a small percentage of the amount of the futures contract. This amount is known as “initial margin.” The nature of initial margin is different from that of margin in security transactions in that it does not involve borrowing money to finance transactions. Rather, initial margin is similar to a performance bond or good faith deposit that is returned to the Fund upon termination of the contract, assuming the Fund satisfies its contractual obligations.

Subsequent payments to and from the broker occur on a daily basis in a process known as “marking to market.” These payments are called “variation margin,” and are made as the value of the underlying futures contract fluctuates. For example, when the Fund sells a futures contract and the price of the underlying security rises above the delivery price, the Fund’s position declines in value. The Fund then pays a broker a variation margin payment equal to the difference between the delivery price of the futures contract and the market price of the securities underlying the futures contract. Conversely, if the price of the underlying security falls below the delivery price of the contract, the Fund’s futures position increases in value. The broker then must make a variation margin payment equal to the difference between the delivery price of the futures contract and the market price of the currency underlying the futures contract.

When the Fund terminates a position in a futures contract, a final determination of variation margin is made, additional cash is paid by or to the Fund, and the Fund realizes a loss or gain. Such closing transactions involve additional commission costs.

### **Index Futures Contracts and Options on Index Futures Contracts**

A stock index futures contract is a contract to buy or sell units of a stock index at a specified future date at a price agreed upon when the contract is made. A debt index futures contract is a contract to buy or sell units of a specified debt index at a specified future date at a price agreed upon when the contract is made. A unit is the current value of the index.

The following example illustrates generally the manner in which index futures contracts operate. The S&P 100 Stock Index ("S&P 100") is composed of 100 selected common stocks, most of which are listed on the New York Stock Exchange ("NYSE"). The S&P 100 assigns relative weightings to the common stocks included in the Index, and the Index fluctuates with changes in the market values of those common stocks. In the case of the S&P 100, contracts are to buy or sell 100 units. Thus, if the value of the S&P 100 were \$180, one contract would be worth \$18,000 (100 units x \$180). The stock index futures contract specifies that no delivery of the actual stocks making up the index will take place. Instead, settlement in cash must occur upon the termination of the contract, with the settlement being the difference between the contract price and the actual level of the stock index at the expiration of the contract. For example, if the Fund enters into a futures contract to buy 100 units of the S&P 100 at a specified future date at a contract price of \$180 and the S&P 100 is at \$184 on that future date, the Fund will gain \$400 (100 units x gain of \$4).

If the Fund enters into a futures contract to sell 100 units of the stock index at a specified future date at a contract price of \$180 and the S&P 100 is at \$182 on that future date, the Fund will lose \$200 (100 units x loss of \$2). The Fund may purchase or sell futures contracts with respect to any stock index. Positions in index futures may be closed out only on an exchange or board of trade which provides a secondary market for such futures.

Purchases and sales of index futures may be used to hedge an investment. To hedge an investment successfully, however, the Fund must invest in futures contracts with respect to indices or sub-indices the movements of which will have a significant correlation with movements in the prices of the Fund's securities.

Options on index futures contracts are similar to options on securities except that options on index futures contracts give the purchaser the right, in return for the premium paid, to assume a position in an index futures contract (a long position if the option is a call and a short position if the option is a put) at a specified exercise price at any time during the period of the option. Upon exercise of the option, the holder assumes the underlying futures position and receives a variation margin payment of cash or securities approximating the increase in the value of the holder's option position. If an option is exercised on the last trading day prior to the expiration date of the option, the settlement is made entirely in cash based on the difference between the exercise price of the option and the closing level of the index on which the futures contract is based on the expiration date. Purchasers of options who fail to exercise their options prior to the exercise date suffer a loss of the premium paid. As an alternative to purchasing call and put options on index futures contracts, the Fund may purchase put and call options on the underlying indices themselves to the extent that such options are traded on national securities exchanges. Index options are similar to options on individual securities in that the purchaser of an index option acquires the right to buy, and the writer undertakes the obligation to sell an index at a stated exercise price during the term of the option. Instead of giving the right to take or make actual delivery of securities, the holder of an index option has the right to receive a cash "exercise settlement amount." This amount is equal to the amount by which the fixed exercise price of the option exceeds (in the case of a put) or is less than (in the case of a call) the closing value of the underlying index on the date of the exercise, multiplied by a fixed "index multiplier." The Fund will enter into an option position only if there appears to be a liquid secondary market for such options.

The Fund will not engage in transactions in options on stock indices for speculative purposes but only to protect appreciation attained, to offset capital losses, and to take advantage of the liquidity available in the option markets.

The aggregate premium paid on all options on stock indices will not exceed 20% of the Fund's total assets.

### **Forward Foreign Currency Contracts and Foreign Currency Futures Contracts**

A forward foreign currency contract involves an obligation to purchase or sell a specific currency at a future date, which may be any fixed number of days from the date of the contract as agreed by the parties, at a price set at the time of the contract. In the case of a cancelable forward contract, the holder has the unilateral right to cancel the contract at maturity by paying a specified fee. The contracts are traded in the interbank market conducted directly between currency traders (usually large commercial

banks) and their customers. A forward contract generally has no deposit requirement, and no commissions are charged at any stage for trades.

A foreign currency futures contract is a standardized contract for the future delivery of a specified amount of a foreign currency at a future date at a price set at the time of the contract. Foreign currency futures contracts traded in the U.S. are designed by and traded on exchanges regulated by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (“CFTC”), such as the New York Mercantile Exchange.

Forward foreign currency contracts differ from foreign currency futures contracts in certain respects. For example, the maturity date of a forward contract may be any fixed number of days from the date of the contract agreed upon by the parties, rather than a predetermined date in a given month. Forward contracts may be in any amounts agreed upon by the parties rather than predetermined amounts. Also, forward foreign currency contracts are traded directly between currency traders so that no intermediary is required. A forward contract generally requires no margin or other deposit.

At the maturity of a forward or futures contract, the Fund may either accept or make delivery of the currency specified in the contract, or at or prior to maturity enter into a closing transaction involving the purchase or sale of an offsetting contract. Closing transactions with respect to forward contracts are usually effected with the currency trader who is a party to the original forward contract. Closing transactions with respect to futures contracts are effected on a commodities exchange; a clearing corporation associated with the exchange assumes responsibility for closing out such contracts.

Forward foreign currency contracts and foreign currency futures contracts can be used to increase current return. They are also used in connection with both “transaction hedging” and “position hedging.” (“Foreign Currency Transactions,” above).

## **Swap Agreements**

The Fund may enter into interest rate, index and currency exchange rate swap agreements in an attempt to obtain a particular desired return at a lower cost to the Fund than if it had been invested directly in an instrument that yielded that desired return. Swap agreements are two-party contracts entered into primarily by institutional investors for periods ranging from a few weeks to more than one year. In a standard “swap” transaction, two parties agree to exchange the returns (or differentials in rates of returns) earned or realized on particular predetermined investments or instruments. The gross returns to be exchanged or “swapped” between the parties are calculated with respect to a “notional amount,” i.e., the return on or increase in value of a particular dollar amount invested at a particular interest rate, in a particular foreign currency, or in a “basket” of securities representing a particular index. The “notional amount” of the swap agreement is only a fictive basis on which to calculate the obligations the parties to a swap agreement have agreed to exchange. The Fund’s obligations (or rights) under a swap agreement will generally be equal only to the amount to be paid or received under the agreement based on the relative values of the positions held by each party to the agreement (the “net amount”). The Fund’s obligations under a swap agreement will be accrued daily (offset against any amounts owing to the Fund).

Whether the Fund’s use of swap agreements enhances the Fund’s total return will depend on the Advisor’s ability correctly to predict whether certain types of investments are likely to produce greater returns than other investments. Because they are two-party contracts and may have terms of greater than seven days, swap agreements may be considered to be illiquid. Moreover, the Fund bears the risk of loss of the amount expected to be received under a swap agreement in the event of the default or bankruptcy of a swap agreement counterparty. The Advisor will cause the Fund to enter into swap agreements only with counterparties that would be eligible for consideration as repurchase agreement counterparties under the Fund’s repurchase agreement guidelines. The swap market is a relatively new market and is largely unregulated. It is possible that developments in the swaps market, including potential government relations, could adversely affect the Fund’s ability to terminate existing swap agreements or to realize amounts to be received under such agreements.

Certain swap agreements are exempt from most provisions of the Commodity Exchange Act and, therefore, are not regulated as futures or commodity option transactions under the Commodity Exchange Act, pursuant to regulations of the CFTC. To qualify for this exemption, a swap agreement must be entered into by “eligible participants,” which include the following, provided the participants’ total assets exceed established levels: a bank or trust company, savings association or credit union, insurance company, investment company subject to regulation under the 1940 Act, commodity pool, corporation, partnership, proprietorship, organization, trust, or foreign person. To be eligible, natural persons and most other entities must have total assets exceeding \$10 million; commodity pools and employee benefit plans must have assets exceeding \$5 million. In addition, an eligible swap transaction must meet three conditions. First, the swap agreement may not be part of a fungible class of agreements that are standardized as to their material economic terms. Second, the creditworthiness of parties with actual or potential obligations under the swap agreement must be a material consideration in entering into or determining the terms of the swap

agreement, including pricing, cost, or credit enhancement terms. Third, swap agreements may not be entered into and traded on or through multilateral transaction execution facility.

### **Exclusion of Advisor from Commodity Pool Operator Definition**

With respect to the Fund, the Advisor has claimed an exclusion from the definition of “commodity pool operator” (CPO) under the Commodity Exchange Act (“CEA”) and the rules of the CFTC and, therefore, is not subject to CFTC registration or regulation as a CPO. In addition, with respect to the Fund, the Advisor is relying upon a related exclusion from the definition of “commodity trading advisor” (“CTA”) under the CEA and the rules of the CFTC. The terms of the CPO exclusion require the Fund, among other things, to adhere to certain limits on its investments in “commodity interests.” Commodity interests include commodity futures, commodity options and swaps, which in turn include non-deliverable currency forward contracts, as further described below. Because the Advisor and the Fund intend to comply with the terms of the CPO exclusion, the Fund may, in the future, need to adjust its investment strategies, consistent with its investment objective, to limit its investments in these types of instruments. The Fund is not intended as a vehicle for trading in the commodity futures, commodity options or swaps markets. The CFTC has neither reviewed nor approved the Advisor’s reliance on these exclusions, or the Fund, its investment strategies, or this SAI.

Generally, the exclusion from CPO regulation on which the Advisor relies requires the Fund to meet one of the following tests for its commodity interest positions, other than positions entered into for bona fide hedging purposes (as defined in the rules of the CFTC): either (1) the aggregate initial margin and premiums required to establish the Fund’s positions in commodity interests may not exceed 5% of the liquidation value of the Fund’s portfolio (after taking into account unrealized profits and unrealized losses on any such positions); or (2) the aggregate net notional value of the Fund’s commodity interest positions, determined at the time the most recent such position was established, may not exceed 100% of the liquidation value of the Fund’s portfolio (after taking into account unrealized profits and unrealized losses on any such positions). In addition to meeting one of these trading limitations, the Fund may not be marketed as a commodity pool or otherwise as a vehicle for trading in the commodity futures, commodity options or swaps markets. If, in the future, the Fund can no longer satisfy these requirements, the Advisor would withdraw its notice claiming an exclusion from the definition of a CPO, and the Advisor would be subject to registration and regulation as a CPO with respect to the Fund, in accordance with CFTC rules that apply to CPOs of registered investment companies. Generally, these rules allow for substituted compliance with CFTC disclosure and shareholder reporting requirements, based on the Advisor’s compliance with comparable SEC requirements. However, as a result of CFTC regulation with respect to the Fund, the Fund may incur additional compliance and other expenses.

## **OTHER TRANSACTIONS/INVESTMENTS**

### **Exchange-Traded Notes**

The Fund may invest in exchange-traded notes (“ETNs”). ETNs are generally notes representing the debt of the issuer, usually a financial institution. ETNs combine both aspects of bonds and ETFs. An ETN’s returns are based on the performance of one or more underlying assets, reference rate or indexes, minus fees and expenses. Similar to ETFs, ETNs are listed on an exchange and traded in the secondary market. However, unlike an ETF, an ETN can be held until the ETN’s maturity, at which time the issuer will pay a return linked to the performance of the specific asset, index or rate (“reference instrument”) to which the ETN is lined minus certain fees. Unlike regular bonds, ETNs do not make periodic interest payments, and principal is not protected.

The value of an ETN may be influenced by, among other things, time to maturity, level of supply and demand for the ETN, volatility and lack of liquidity in underlying markets, changes in the applicable interest rates, the performance of the reference instrument, changes in the issuer’s credit rating and economic, legal, political or geographic events that affect the reference instrument. ETNs also incur certain expenses not incurred by their applicable reference instrument. Some ETNs that use leverage can, at times, be relatively illiquid and, thus, they may be difficult to purchase or sell at a fair price. Levered ETNs are subject to the same risk as other instruments that use leverage in any form. While leverage allows for greater potential return, the potential for loss is also greater. Finally, additional losses may be incurred if the investment loses value because, in addition to the money lost on the investment, the loan still needs to be repaid.

### **Other Investment Company Securities**

The Fund may invest in securities of other investment companies (“Acquired Funds”), including other ETFs and traditional mutual funds, as an efficient means of carrying out its investment policies and managing their uninvested cash. The Fund’s shareholders indirectly bear the expenses of the Acquired Funds in which the Fund invests.



Except under exemptive rules or relief from the SEC, including Rule 12d1-4 discussed below, the Fund may not invest more than 10% of its total assets at any one time in the shares of Acquired Funds, 5% of its total assets in the shares of any one Acquired Fund, or own more than 3% of the shares of any one Acquired Fund. When the Fund invests in the shares of Acquired Funds, investment advisory and other fees will apply, and the investment's yield will be reduced accordingly.

Rule 12d1-4 under the 1940 Act allows a fund to acquire the securities of another investment company in excess of the limitations imposed by Section 12 of the 1940 Act without obtaining an exemptive order from the SEC, subject to certain terms and conditions. Among other conditions, the rule generally requires that, prior to acquiring the securities of another fund in reliance on the rule, the acquiring fund must enter into a fund of funds investment agreement with the acquired fund.

Rule 12d1-4 is also designed to limit the use of complex fund structures. Under Rule 12d1-4, an acquired fund is prohibited from purchasing or otherwise acquiring the securities of another investment company or private fund if, immediately after the purchase, the securities of investment companies and private funds owned by the acquired fund have an aggregate value in excess of 10% of the value of the acquired fund's total assets, subject to certain limited exceptions.

In addition to Rule 12d1-4, the 1940 Act and related rules provide other exemptions from these restrictions. For example, these limitations do not apply to investments by the Fund in investment companies that are money market funds, including money market funds that have the Advisor or an affiliate of the Advisor as an investment adviser.

### **Repurchase Agreements**

Repurchase agreements are agreements through which banks, broker-dealers, and other financial institutions approved by the Trustees, sell securities (usually U.S. Government securities) to the Fund and agree to repurchase those securities at a specified price and time (usually not more than seven days from the original sale). The seller's obligation to pay the repurchase price is secured by the securities to be repurchased. These securities are required to be held by the Fund, the Custodian, or a third-party custodian. In order to protect the Fund's interest, collateral securities must have a value of at least 100% of the resale price at all times. (The seller must provide additional collateral in the event that this condition is not met). In general, the Advisor will require collateral securities to have a value of at least 102% of the resale price at the time the repurchase agreement is made. The collateral is marked to market on a daily basis, thus enabling the Advisor to determine when to request additional collateral from the seller.

If a seller defaults on its repurchase obligation, the Fund could realize a loss on the sale of the underlying securities to the extent that the proceeds of the sale (including accrued interest) are less than the resale price. In addition, even though the U.S. Bankruptcy Code provides protection to the Fund if the seller becomes bankrupt or insolvent, the Fund may suffer losses in such event.

### **Reverse Repurchase Agreements**

The Fund may borrow funds for temporary purposes by entering into reverse repurchase agreements, provided such action is consistent with the Fund's investment objective and fundamental investment restrictions. As a matter of non-fundamental policy, each Fund intends to limit total borrowings under reverse repurchase agreements to no more than 10% of the value of its total assets. Pursuant to a reverse repurchase agreement, the Fund will sell portfolio securities to financial institutions such as banks or to broker-dealers, and agree to repurchase the securities at a mutually agreed-upon date and price. The Fund intends to enter into reverse repurchase agreements only to avoid otherwise selling securities during unfavorable market conditions to meet redemptions. Reverse repurchase agreements involve the risk that the market value of the securities sold by the Fund may decline below the price at which the Fund is obligated to repurchase the securities. Reverse repurchase agreements and certain other financing transactions that involve a future payment obligation are subject to Rule 18f-4 under the 1940 Act.

### **Restricted and Illiquid Securities**

Generally, an "illiquid security" or "illiquid investment" is any investment that the Fund reasonably expects cannot be sold or disposed of in current market conditions in seven calendar days or less without the sale or disposition significantly changing the market value of the investment. Illiquid investments generally include investments for which no market exists, or which are legally restricted as to their transfer (such as those issued pursuant to an exemption from the registration requirements of the federal securities laws). Restricted securities are generally sold in privately negotiated transactions, pursuant to an

exemption from registration under the 1933 Act. If registration of a security previously acquired in a private transaction is required, the Fund, as the holder of the security, may be obligated to pay all or part of the registration expense and a considerable period may elapse between the time it decides to seek registration and the time it will be permitted to sell a security under an effective registration statement. If, during such a period, adverse market conditions were to develop, the Fund might obtain a less favorable price than prevailed when it decided to seek registration of the security. To the extent it is determined that there is a liquid institutional or other market for certain restricted securities, the Fund would consider them to be liquid securities. An example is a restricted security that may be freely transferred among qualified institutional buyers pursuant to Rule 144A under the 1933 Act, and for which a liquid institutional market has developed. Rule 144A securities may be subject, however, to a greater possibility of becoming illiquid than securities that have been registered with the SEC.

The following factors may be taken into account in determining whether a restricted security is properly considered a liquid security: (i) the frequency of trades and quotes for the security; (ii) the number of dealers willing to buy or sell the security and the number of other potential buyers; (iii) any dealer undertakings to make a market in the security; and (iv) the nature of the security and of the marketplace trades (e.g., any demand, put or tender features, the method of soliciting offers, the mechanics and other requirements for transfer, and the ability to assign or offset the rights and obligations of the security). The nature of the security and its trading includes the time needed to sell the security, the method of soliciting offers to purchase or sell the security, and the mechanics of transferring the security including the role of parties such as foreign or U.S. custodians, subcustodians, currency exchange brokers, and depositories.

The sale of illiquid investments often requires more time and results in higher brokerage charges or dealer discounts and other selling expenses than the sale of investments eligible for trading on national securities exchanges or in the OTC markets. Illiquid investments often sell at a price lower than similar investments that are not subject to restrictions on resale.

The risk to the Fund in holding illiquid investments is that they may be more difficult to sell if the Fund wants to dispose of the investment in response to adverse developments or in order to raise money for redemptions or other investment opportunities. Illiquid trading conditions may also make it more difficult for the Fund to realize an investment's fair value.

The Fund may also be unable to achieve its desired level of exposure to a certain investment, issuer, or sector due to overall limitations on its ability to invest in illiquid investments and the difficulty in purchasing such investments.

The Fund may not acquire any illiquid investment if, immediately after the acquisition, it would have invested more than 15% of its net assets in illiquid investments that are assets. Because illiquid investments may not be readily marketable, the portfolio managers and/or investment personnel may not be able to dispose of them in a timely manner. As a result, the Fund may be forced to hold illiquid investments while their price depreciates. Depreciation in the price of illiquid investments may cause the net asset value or market price of the Fund to decline.

## **Securities Lending**

In order to generate additional income, the Fund may lend its portfolio securities on a short-term basis to certain brokers, dealers or other financial institutions. In determining whether to lend to a particular broker, dealer or financial institution, the Advisor will consider all relevant facts and circumstances, including the size, creditworthiness and reputation of the borrower. Any loans made will be continuously secured by collateral in cash at least equal to 100% of the value of the securities on loan for the Fund. The Fund may lend up to 33 ⅓% of its total assets. Such loans must be fully collateralized by cash or U.S. government obligations and marked to market daily. Although the loan is fully collateralized, if the borrower defaults, the Fund could lose money.

While portfolio securities are on loan, the borrower will pay to the lending Fund any dividends or interest received on the securities. In addition, the Fund retains all or a portion of the interest received on investment of the collateral or receives a fee from the borrower. Although voting rights, or rights to consent, with respect to the loaned securities pass to the borrower, the lending Fund retains the right to call the loans at any time on reasonable notice, and it will do so to enable the Fund to exercise voting rights on any matters materially affecting the investment. The Fund may also call such loans in order to sell the securities.

One of the risks in lending portfolio securities, as with other extensions of credit, is the possible delay in recovery of the securities or possible loss of rights in the collateral should the borrower fail financially. There is also the risk that, when lending portfolio securities, the securities may not be available to the Fund on a timely basis and the Fund may, therefore,

lose the opportunity to sell the securities at a desirable price. In addition, in the event that a borrower of securities would file for bankruptcy or become insolvent, disposition of the securities may be delayed pending court action.

### **When-issued and Delayed Delivery Transactions**

When-issued securities are securities purchased for delivery beyond the normal settlement date at a stated price and yield and thereby involve risk that the yield obtained in the transaction will be less than that available in the market when the delivery takes place or that the seller will fail to complete the transaction. In addition, because of delayed settlement, the Fund may pay more than market value on the settlement date. The Advisor may choose to dispose of a commitment prior to settlement. The Fund will not pay for such securities or start earning interest on them until they are received.

The Fund does not intend to engage in when-issued and delayed delivery transactions unless it can physically settle the transaction within 35 days of its trade date.

## **INVESTMENT RISKS**

The Prospectus discusses the Fund's principal investment risks. Below you will find more detail about the risks associated with the types of investments and investment practices permitted by the Fund, including those which are not principal investment risks of the Fund.

### **EQUITY SECURITIES RISK**

#### **General Risk**

Equity risk is the risk that stock prices will fall quickly and dramatically over short or extended periods of time. Stock markets tend to move in cycles, with periods of rising prices and periods of falling prices. Often, dramatic movements in prices occur in response to the overall market environment or reports of a company's earnings, economic statistics, or other factors that affect an issuer's profitability. The price of equity securities can decline and reduce the value of the Fund investing in equities. Stock markets are volatile.

To the extent that the Fund invests in smaller capitalization stocks, it may be subject to greater risks than those associated with investment in larger, more established companies. Smaller companies tend to have limited product lines, markets, or financial resources, and may be dependent on a small management group. Smaller company stocks may be subject to more abrupt or erratic price movements, for reasons such as lower trading volumes, greater sensitivity to changing conditions, and less certain growth prospects. Additionally, there are fewer market makers for these stocks and wider spreads between quoted bid and ask prices in the over-the-counter market for these stocks. Small cap stocks also tend to be subject to greater liquidity risk, particularly during periods of market disruption, and there is often less publicly available information concerning these securities. The Fund that invests in high-quality or "blue chip" equity securities or securities of established companies with large market capitalizations (which generally have strong financial characteristics) can also be negatively impacted by overall market and economic conditions.

#### **Exchange-Traded Funds Risk**

ETFs generally present the same primary risks as an investment in a conventional fund (e.g., one that is not exchange traded) that has the same investment objectives, strategies, and policies. The price of an ETF can fluctuate up or down, and the Fund could lose money investing in the ETF if the prices of the securities owned by the ETF go down. In addition, an investment in an ETF may be subject to the following risks that do not apply to conventional funds: (1) the market price of the ETF's shares may trade above or below their NAV; (2) an active trading market for the ETF's shares may not develop or be maintained; or (3) trading of the ETF's shares may be halted if the listing exchange's officials deem such action appropriate, the shares are delisted from the exchange, or the activation of market-wide "circuit breakers" (which are tied to large decreases in stock prices) halts stock trading generally.

**Market Price Variance Risk (ETFs).** ETFs are listed for trading on a securities exchange and can be bought and sold in the secondary market at market prices. The market prices of ETF shares will fluctuate in response to changes in their respective NAVs and supply and demand for their shares. Differences between secondary market prices and the NAV for an ETF's shares may be due largely to supply and demand forces in the secondary market, which forces may not be the same as those influencing prices for securities or instruments held by the Fund at a particular time. There may, however, be times when the market price and the NAV vary significantly, and an investor may pay more than NAV when buying ETF shares on the

secondary market and receive less than NAV when it sells those ETF shares. The market price of ETF shares includes a “bid-ask spread” charged by the lead market maker, market makers or other participants that trade ETF shares. In times of severe market disruption, the bid-ask spread often increases significantly. This means that an ETF’s shares may trade at a discount to NAV, and the discount is likely to be greatest when the price of the ETF’s shares is falling fastest, which may be the time that investors most want to sell the ETF’s shares. An ETF’s investment results are measured based upon the daily NAV of the ETF. Accordingly, the Fund purchasing and selling ETFs in the secondary market may not experience investment results consistent with those purchasing from and redeeming Creation Units with an ETF directly.

### **Securities Linked to the Real Estate Market and REIT Risk**

Investing in securities of companies in the real estate industry subjects the Fund to the risks associated with the direct ownership of real estate. These risks include:

- declines in the value of real estate;
- risks related to local, regional, and national economic conditions;
- possible lack of availability of mortgage funds;
- overbuilding;
- extended vacancies of properties;
- increased competition;
- increases in property taxes and operating expenses;
- change in zoning laws;
- losses due to costs resulting from the clean-up of environmental problems;
- liability to third parties for damages resulting from environmental problems;
- casualty or condemnation losses;
- limitations on rents;
- changes in neighborhood values and the appeal of properties to tenants; and
- changes in interest rates.

Securities of companies in the real estate industry include equity REITs and mortgage REITs. Equity REITs may be affected by changes in the value of the underlying property owned by the trusts, while mortgage REITs may be affected by the quality of any credit extended. Further, equity and mortgage REITs are dependent upon management skills and generally may not be diversified. Equity and mortgage REITs are also subject to heavy cash flow dependency, defaults by borrowers, and self-liquidations. In addition, equity and mortgage REITs could possibly fail to qualify for tax free pass-through of income under the Code, or to maintain their exemptions from registration under the 1940 Act. The above factors may also adversely affect a borrower’s or a lessee’s ability to meet its obligations to the REIT. In the event of a default by a borrower or lessee, the REIT may experience delays in enforcing its rights as a mortgagee or lessor and may incur substantial costs associated with protecting its investments.

In addition, even the larger REITs in the industry tend to be small to medium-sized companies in relation to the equity markets as a whole. See “Small and Medium Size Company Risk” (below) for a discussion of the risks associated with investments in these companies.

### **Small and Medium Size Company Risk**

Companies that are small or unseasoned (e.g., less than three years of operating history) are more likely than larger or established companies to fail or not to accomplish their goals. As a result, the value of their securities could decline significantly. These companies are less likely to survive since they are often dependent upon a small number of products and may have limited financial resources and a small management group. Small or unseasoned companies often have a greater degree of change in earnings and business prospects than larger or established companies, resulting in more volatility in the price of their securities. The securities of small or unseasoned companies may have limited marketability. This factor could cause the value of the Fund’s investments to decrease if it needs to sell such securities when there are few interested buyers. Small or unseasoned companies usually have fewer outstanding shares than larger or established companies. Therefore, it may be more difficult to buy or sell large amounts of these shares without unfavorably impacting the price of the security. There may be less publicly available information about small or unseasoned companies. Therefore, when making a decision to purchase a security for the Fund, the

Advisor may not be aware of problems associated with the company issuing the security. Investments in the securities of medium-sized companies present risks similar to those associated with small or unseasoned companies, although to a lesser degree due to the larger size of the companies.

## **FOREIGN SECURITIES RISK**

### **General Risk**

Compared with investing in the U.S., investing in foreign markets involves a greater degree and variety of risk. Investors in international or foreign markets may face delayed settlements, currency controls, and adverse economic developments as well as higher overall transaction costs. Foreign governments may expropriate assets, impose capital or currency controls, impose punitive taxes, impose limits on ownership, or nationalize a company or industry. Any of these actions could have a severe effect on security prices and impair the Fund's ability to bring its capital or income back to the U.S. The value of foreign securities may be affected by incomplete, less frequent, or inaccurate financial information about their issuers, social upheavals or political actions ranging from tax code changes to governmental collapse. Foreign Companies may also receive less coverage than U.S. companies by market analysts and the financial press. In addition, foreign countries may lack uniform accounting, auditing, and financial reporting standards, or regulatory requirements comparable to those applicable to U.S. companies.

The securities of some Foreign Companies are less liquid and at times more volatile than securities of comparable U.S. companies. Foreign brokerage commissions and other fees are also generally higher than in the U.S.

In addition, with respect to certain foreign countries, there is a possibility of nationalization or expropriation of assets, confiscatory taxation, political or financial instability, and diplomatic developments which could affect the value of investments in those countries. In certain countries, legal remedies available to investors may be more limited than those available with respect to investments in the U.S. or other countries. The laws of some foreign countries may limit the Fund's ability to invest in securities of certain issuers located in those countries. Special tax considerations apply to foreign securities.

### **ADRs and Domestically Traded Foreign Securities Risk**

Because the Fund may invest in ADRs and other domestically traded securities of Foreign Companies, the Fund's share prices may be more affected by foreign economic and political conditions, taxation policies, and accounting and auditing standards than if the Fund did not invest in such securities.

### **Currency Risk**

Exchange rates for currencies fluctuate daily. Fluctuations in the U.S. dollar's value versus other currencies may erode or reverse gains from investments denominated in foreign currencies or widen losses. The combination of currency risk and market risk tends to make securities traded in foreign markets more volatile than securities traded exclusively in the U.S. Exchange rates for currencies fluctuate daily. Foreign securities are normally denominated and traded in foreign currencies. As a result, the value of the Fund's foreign investments and the value of its shares may be affected favorably or unfavorably by changes in currency exchange rates relative to the U.S. dollar. The combination of currency risk and market risks tends to make securities traded in foreign markets more volatile than securities traded exclusively in the U.S. Exchange rate fluctuations also may impair an issuer's ability to repay U.S. dollar denominated debt, thereby increasing credit risk of such debt.

### **Foreign Custodial Services and Related Investment Costs Risk**

Foreign custodial services and other costs relating to investment in international securities markets are generally more expensive than in the U.S. Foreign markets have settlement and clearance procedures that differ from those in the U.S. Foreign settlement procedures and trade regulations also may involve certain risks such as delays in payment or delivery of securities or in the recovery of the Fund's assets held abroad. In certain markets, particularly emerging markets, there have been times when settlements have been unable to keep pace with the volume of securities transactions, making it difficult to conduct such transactions. The inability of the Fund to make intended securities purchases due to settlement problems could cause the Fund to miss attractive investment opportunities. Inability to dispose of a portfolio security caused by settlement problems could result in losses to the Fund due to a subsequent decline in value of the portfolio security. In addition, security settlement and clearance procedures in some emerging market countries may not fully protect the Fund against loss or theft of its assets.

Certain foreign companies may be subject to sanctions, embargoes, or other governmental actions that may impair or otherwise limit the ability to invest in, receive, hold, or sell the securities of such companies. These factors may affect the value of

investments in those companies. In addition, certain companies may operate in, or have dealings with, countries that the U.S. Government has identified as state sponsors of terrorism. As a result, such companies may be subject to specific constraints or regulations under U.S. law and, additionally, may be subject to negative investor perception, either of which could adversely affect such companies' performance.

Russia's military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the resulting responses by the United States and other countries, and the potential for wider conflict could increase volatility and uncertainty in the financial markets and adversely affect regional and global economies. The United States and other countries have imposed broad-ranging economic sanctions on Russia, certain Russian individuals, banking entities and corporations, and Belarus as a response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and may impose sanctions on other countries that provide military or economic support to Russia. The extent and duration of Russia's military actions and the repercussions of such actions (including any retaliatory actions or countermeasures that may be taken by those subject to sanctions, including cyber-attacks) are impossible to predict, but could result in significant market disruptions, including in particular industries or sectors, such as the oil and natural gas markets, and may negatively affect global supply chains, inflation and global economic growth. These and any related events could significantly impact the Fund's performance and the value of an investment in the Fund, even if the Fund does not have direct exposure to Russian issuers or issuers in other countries affected by the invasion. Additionally, due to current and potential future sanctions or potential market closures impacting the ability to trade Russian securities, the Fund may experience higher transaction costs, difficulty in valuing affected securities and losses in the value of the Fund's investments.

### **Emerging Markets Risk**

Investing in emerging market securities involves risks which are in addition to the usual risks inherent in foreign investments. Some emerging markets countries may have fixed or managed currencies that are not free-floating against the U.S. dollar. Further, certain currencies may not be traded internationally. Certain of these currencies have experienced a steady devaluation relative to the U.S. dollar. Any devaluation in the currencies in which the Fund's securities are denominated may have a detrimental impact on the Fund.

Some countries with emerging securities markets have experienced substantial, and in some periods, extremely high, rates of inflation for many years. Inflation and rapid fluctuation in inflation rates have had and may continue to have negative effects on the economies and securities markets of certain countries. Moreover, the economies of some countries may differ favorably or unfavorably from the U.S. economy in such respects as rate of growth of gross domestic product, the rate of inflation, capital reinvestment, resource self-sufficiency, number and depth of industries forming the economy's base, governmental controls, and investment restrictions that are subject to political change and balance of payments position. Further, there may be greater difficulties or restrictions with respect to investments made in emerging markets countries.

Emerging markets typically have substantially less volume than U.S. markets. In addition, securities in many such markets are less liquid, and their prices often are more volatile, than securities of comparable U.S. companies. Such markets often have different clearance and settlement procedures for securities transactions, and in some markets, there have been times when settlements have been unable to keep pace with the volume of transactions, making it difficult to conduct transactions. Delays in settlement could result in temporary periods when assets may not be invested. Settlement problems in emerging markets countries also could cause the Fund to miss attractive investment opportunities. Satisfactory custodial services may not be available in some emerging markets countries, which may result in the Fund incurring additional costs and delays in the transportation and custody of such securities.

### **FIXED INCOME SECURITIES RISK**

#### **Counterparty Credit Risk**

The value of the Fund's investments may be adversely affected if a security's credit rating is downgraded; an issuer of an investment held by the Fund fails to pay an obligation on a timely basis, otherwise defaults, or is perceived by other investors to be less creditworthy; or a counterparty to a derivatives or other transaction with the Fund files for bankruptcy, becomes insolvent, or otherwise becomes unable or unwilling to honor its obligation to the Fund.

#### **Credit Risk**

Credit risk is the possibility that an issuer may default on a security by failing to pay interest or principal when due. If an issuer defaults, the Fund will lose money.

Many fixed income securities receive credit ratings from services such as S&P and Moody's. These services assign ratings to securities by assessing the likelihood of issuer default. Lower credit ratings correspond to higher credit risk. If a security has not received a rating, the Fund must rely entirely upon the Advisor's credit assessment.

Fixed income securities generally compensate for greater credit risk by paying interest at a higher rate. The difference between the yield of a security and the yield of a U.S. Treasury security with a comparable maturity (the spread) measures the additional interest paid for risk. Spreads may increase generally in response to adverse economic or market conditions. A security's spread may also increase if the security's rating is lowered, or the security is perceived to have an increased credit risk. An increase in the spread will cause the price of the security to decline.

### **Interest Rate Risk**

Prices of fixed income securities rise and fall in response to changes in the interest rate paid by similar securities. Generally, when interest rates rise, prices of fixed income securities fall. However, market factors, such as the demand for particular fixed income securities, may cause the price of certain fixed income securities to fall while the prices of other securities rise or remain unchanged. Interest rate changes have a greater effect on the price of fixed income securities with longer durations. Duration measures the price sensitivity of a fixed income security to changes in interest rates.

Changing interest rates may have unpredictable effects on markets, may result in heightened market volatility and increased redemptions, and may detract from the Fund's performance to the extent the Fund is exposed to such interest rates and/or volatility. An increase in prevailing interest rates typically causes the value of existing debt securities to fall and often has a greater impact on longer-duration debt securities and higher quality debt securities. A general rise in interest rates may cause investors to move out of fixed income securities on a large scale, which could adversely affect the price and liquidity of fixed income securities and could also result in increased redemptions for the Fund. During periods when inflation rates are high or rising, the Fund may be subject to a greater risk of rising interest rates.

In a low or negative interest rate environment, debt securities may trade at, or be issued with, negative yields, which means the purchaser of the security may receive at maturity less than the total amount invested. In addition, in a negative interest rate environment, if a bank charges negative interest, instead of receiving interest on deposits, a depositor must pay the bank fees to keep money with the bank. To the extent the Fund holds a negatively yielding debt security or has a bank deposit with a negative interest rate, the Fund would generate a negative return on that investment. Cash positions may also subject the Fund to increased counterparty risk to the Fund's bank. Debt market conditions are highly unpredictable, and some parts of the market are subject to dislocations.

If low or negative interest rates become more prevalent in the market and/or if low or negative interest rates persist for a sustained period of time, some investors may seek to reallocate assets to other income-producing assets. This may cause the price of such higher yielding instruments to rise, could further reduce the value of instruments with a negative yield, and may limit the Fund's ability to locate fixed income instruments containing the desired risk/return profile. Changing interest rates, including rates that fall below zero, could have unpredictable effects on the markets and may expose fixed income markets to heightened volatility, increased redemptions, and potential illiquidity. In recent years, the Federal Reserve began implementing increases to the federal funds interest rate and there may be further rate increases. As the federal funds rate rises, interest rates across the financial system also may rise. To the extent interest rates increase substantially and/or rapidly, the Fund may be subject to significant losses.

The low interest rate environment observed in prior years was created in part by actions taken by the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System (the "Federal Reserve") to keep the federal funds rate at a low level, including expanding the scope of its repurchase agreement operations, and purchasing large quantities of securities issued or guaranteed by the U.S. government, its agencies or instrumentalities on the open market. In recent years, the Federal Reserve has "tapered" its quantitative easing programs and, in 2022, began implementing increases to the federal funds rate. Further rate increases are expected. As interest rates rise, there is risk that rates across the financial system also may rise. Changes in government intervention may have adverse effects on the Fund's investments, volatility, and illiquidity in debt markets. Interest rate increases could cause the value of any Fund that invests in fixed income securities to decrease to the extent that it invests in fixed income securities. Federal Reserve policy changes may expose fixed-income and related markets to heightened volatility and may reduce liquidity for certain Fund investments, which could cause the value of the Fund's investments and share price to decline. If the Fund invests in derivatives tied to fixed-income markets, the Fund may be more substantially exposed to

these risks than a fund that does not invest in derivatives. To the extent the Fund experiences high redemptions because of these policy changes, the Fund may experience increased portfolio turnover, which will increase the costs the Fund incurs and may lower its performance. Furthermore, if rising interest rates cause the Fund to lose enough value, the Fund could also face increased shareholder redemptions, which could force the Fund to liquidate investments at disadvantageous times or prices, therefore adversely affecting the Fund. In addition, decreases in fixed income dealer market-making capacity may persist in the future, potentially leading to decreased liquidity and increased volatility in the fixed income markets.

### **ETN Investment Risk**

Because the return on the ETN is dependent on the issuer's ability or willingness to meet its obligations, the value of the ETN may change due to a change in the issuer's credit rating, despite no change in the underlying reference instrument. The market value of ETN shares may differ from the value of the reference instrument.

This difference in price may be due to the fact that the supply and demand in the market for ETN shares at any point in time is not always identical to the supply and demand in the market for the assets underlying the reference instrument that the ETN seeks to track.

There may be restrictions on the Fund's right to redeem its investment in an ETN, which are generally meant to be held until maturity. The Fund's decision to sell its ETN holdings may be limited by the availability of a secondary market. An investor in an ETN could lose some or all of the amount invested.

### **DERIVATIVE CONTRACTS RISK**

#### **General Risk**

The use of derivative contracts involves risks different from, or possibly greater than, the risks associated with investing directly in securities and other traditional investments. First, changes in the value of the derivative contracts in which the Fund invests may not be correlated with changes in the value of the underlying asset or if they are correlated, may move in the opposite direction than originally anticipated.

Second, while some strategies involving derivatives may reduce the risk of loss, they may also reduce potential gains or, in some cases, result in losses by offsetting favorable price movements in portfolio holdings. Third, there is a risk that derivative contracts may be mispriced or improperly valued and, as a result, the Fund may need to make increased cash payments to the counterparty. Fourth, derivative contracts may cause the Fund to realize increased ordinary income or short-term capital gains (which are treated as ordinary income for Federal income tax purposes) and, as a result, may increase taxable distributions to shareholders. Fifth, a common provision in OTC derivative contracts permits the counterparty to terminate any such contract between it and the Fund, if the value of the Fund's total net assets declines below a specified level over a given time period. Factors that may contribute to such a decline (which usually must be substantial) include significant shareholder redemptions and/or a marked decrease in the market value of the Fund's investments. Any such termination of the Fund's OTC derivative contracts may adversely affect the Fund (for example, by increasing losses and/or costs, and/or preventing the Fund from fully implementing its investment strategies). Finally, derivative contracts may also involve other risks described in this SAI, such as stock market, interest rate, credit, currency, liquidity, and leverage risks.

When a derivative is used as a hedge against an offsetting position that the Fund also holds, any loss generated by that derivative will be substantially offset by the gains on the hedged security, and vice versa. To the extent the Fund uses a derivative security for purposes other than as a hedge, or, if the Fund hedges imperfectly, the Fund is directly exposed to the risks of that derivative or other instrument and any loss generated by that derivative or other instrument will not be offset by a gain.

#### **Options Risk**

When the Fund purchases an option, it runs the risk that it will lose its entire investment in the option in a relatively short period of time, unless the Fund exercises the option or enters into a closing sale transaction with respect to the option during the life of the option. If the price of the underlying security does not rise (in the case of a call) or fall (in the case of a put) to an extent sufficient to cover the option premium and transaction costs, the Fund will lose part or all of its investment in the option. This contrasts with an investment by the Fund in the underlying security, since the Fund will not lose any of its investment in such security if the price does not change.



The use of options also involves the risk of imperfect correlation between movements in option prices and movements in the value of the underlying securities.

The effective use of options also depends on the Fund's ability to terminate option positions at times when the Advisor deems it desirable to do so. Although the Fund will take an option position only if the Advisor believes there is a liquid secondary market for the option, there is no assurance that the Fund will be able to effect closing transactions at any particular time or at an acceptable price.

The Fund generally expects that its options transactions will be conducted on recognized exchanges. In certain instances, however, the Fund may purchase and sell options in the OTC markets. The Fund's ability to terminate options in the OTC market may be more limited than for exchange-traded options and may also involve the risk that securities dealers participating in such transactions would be unable to meet their obligations to the Fund.

The Fund will, however, engage in OTC market transactions only when appropriate exchange-traded transactions are unavailable and when, in the opinion of the Advisor, the pricing mechanism and liquidity of the OTC market is satisfactory, and the participants are responsible parties likely to meet their contractual obligations.

If a secondary trading market in options were to become unavailable, the Fund could no longer engage in closing transactions. Lack of investor interest might adversely affect the liquidity of the market for particular options or series of options. A market may discontinue trading of a particular option or options generally. In addition, a market could become temporarily unavailable if unusual events, such as, volume in excess of trading or clearing capability, were to interrupt its normal operations.

A market may at times find it necessary to impose restrictions on particular types of options transactions, such as opening transactions. For example, if an underlying security ceases to meet qualifications imposed by the market or the Options Clearing Corporation, new series of options on that security will no longer be opened to replace expiring series, and opening transactions in existing series may be prohibited. If an options market were to become unavailable, the Fund as a holder of an option would be able to realize profits or limit losses only by exercising the option, and the Fund, as option writer, would remain obligated under the option until expiration.

Disruptions in the markets for the securities underlying options purchased or sold by the Fund could result in losses on the options. If trading is interrupted in an underlying security, the trading of options on that security is normally halted as well. As a result, the Fund as purchaser or writer of an option will be unable to close out its positions until options trading resumes, and it may be faced with considerable losses if trading in the security reopens at a substantially different price. In addition, the Options Clearing Corporation or other options markets may impose exercise restrictions. If a prohibition on exercise is imposed at the time when trading in the option has also been halted, the Fund as a purchaser or writer of an option will be locked into its position until one of the two restrictions has been lifted. If the Options Clearing Corporation were to determine that the available supply of an underlying security appears insufficient to permit delivery by the writers of all outstanding calls in the event of exercise, it may prohibit indefinitely the exercise of put options by holders who would be unable to deliver the underlying interest. The Fund, as holder of such a put option, could lose its entire investment if the prohibition remained in effect until the put option's expiration and the Fund was unable either to acquire the underlying security or to sell the put option in the market.

Special risks are presented by internationally traded options. Because of time differences between the U.S. and various foreign countries, and because different holidays are observed in different countries, foreign options markets may be open for trading during hours or on days when U.S. markets are closed. As a result, option premium may not reflect the current prices of the underlying interest in the U.S.

An exchange-listed option may be closed out only on an exchange which provides a secondary market for an option of the same series. There is no assurance that a liquid secondary market on an exchange will exist for any particular option or at any particular time. If no secondary market were to exist, it would be impossible to enter into a closing transaction to close out an option position. As a result, the Fund may be forced to continue to hold, or to purchase at a fixed price, a security on which it has sold an option at a time when the Advisor believes it is inadvisable to do so.

Higher than anticipated trading activity or order flow or other unforeseen events might cause the Options Clearing Corporation or an exchange to institute special trading procedures or restrictions that might restrict the Fund's use of options. The exchanges have established limitations on the maximum number of calls and puts of each class that may be held or written by an investor or group of investors acting in concert. It is possible that the Trust and other clients of the Advisor may be

considered such a group. These position limits may restrict the Trust's ability to purchase or sell options on particular securities. Options that are not traded on national securities exchanges may be closed out only with the other party to the option transaction. For that reason, it may be more difficult to close out unlisted options than listed options. Furthermore, unlisted options are not subject to the protection afforded purchasers of listed options by the Options Clearing Corporation.

### **Liquidity Risk**

Positions in futures contracts may be closed out only on an exchange or board of trade which provides a secondary market for such futures. Although the Fund intends to purchase or sell futures only on exchanges or boards of trade where there appears to be an active secondary market, there is no assurance that a liquid secondary market on an exchange or board of trade will exist for any particular contract or at any particular time. If there is not a liquid secondary market at a particular time, it may not be possible to close a futures position at such time and, in the event of adverse price movements, the Fund would continue to be required to make daily cash payments of variation margin. However, in the event financial futures are used to hedge portfolio securities, such securities will not generally be sold until the financial futures can be terminated. In such circumstances, an increase in the price of the portfolio securities, if any, may partially or completely offset losses on the financial futures. In addition to the risks that apply to all options transactions, here are several special risks relating to options on futures contracts. The ability to establish and close out positions in such options will be subject to the development and maintenance of a liquid secondary market. It is not certain that such a market will develop. Although the Fund generally will purchase only those options for which there appears to be an active secondary market, there is no assurance that a liquid secondary market on an exchange will exist for any particular option or at any particular time. In the event that no such market exists for particular options, it might not be possible to effect closing transactions in such options, with the result that the Fund would have to exercise the options in order to realize any profit.

### **Hedging Risk**

There are several risks in connection with the use by the Fund of futures contracts and related options as a hedging device. One risk arises because of the imperfect correlation between movements in the prices of the futures contracts and options and movements in the prices of securities that are the subject of the hedge. The Advisor will, however, attempt to reduce this risk by purchasing and selling, to the extent possible, futures contracts and related options on securities and indices, the movements of which will, in its judgment, correlate closely with movements in the prices of the portfolio securities sought to be hedged.

Successful use of futures contracts and options by the Fund for hedging purposes is also subject to the Advisor's ability to correctly predict movements in the direction of the market. It is possible that, where the Fund has purchased puts on futures contracts to hedge its portfolio against a decline in the market, the securities or index on which the puts are purchased may increase in value and the value of securities held in the portfolio may decline. If this occurred, the Fund would lose money on the puts and also experience a decline in value in its portfolio securities. In addition, the prices of futures, for a number of reasons, may not correlate perfectly with movements in the underlying securities or index due to certain market distortions. First, all participants in the futures market are subject to margin deposit requirements. Such requirements may cause investors to close futures contracts through offsetting transactions which could distort the normal relationship between the underlying security or index and futures markets. Second, the margin requirements in the futures markets are less onerous than margin requirements in the securities markets in general, and as a result the futures markets may attract more speculators than the securities markets do. Increased participation by speculators in the futures markets may also cause temporary price distortions. Due to the possibility of price distortion, even a correct forecast of general market trends by the Advisor may still not result in a successful hedging transaction over a very short time period.

### **Other Risks**

The Fund will incur brokerage fees in connection with their futures and options transactions. In addition, while futures contracts and options on futures will be purchased and sold to reduce certain risks, those transactions themselves entail certain other risks. Thus, while the Fund may benefit from the use of futures and related options, unanticipated changes in interest rates or stock price movements may result in a poorer overall performance for the Fund than if it had not entered into any futures contracts or options transactions. Moreover, in the event of an imperfect correlation between the futures position and the portfolio position that is intended to be protected, the desired protection may not be obtained, and the Fund may be exposed to risk of loss.

### **Forward Foreign Currency and Foreign Currency Futures Contracts Risk**

Among the risks of using foreign currency futures contracts is the fact that positions in these contracts (and any related options) may be closed out only on an exchange or board of trade which provides a secondary market. Although it is intended that the

Fund using foreign currency futures contracts and related options will only purchase or sell them on exchanges or boards of trade where there appears to be an active secondary market, there is no assurance that a secondary market on an exchange or board of trade will exist for any particular contract or option or at any particular time. In such event, it may not be possible to close a futures or related option position, and, in the event of adverse price movements, the Fund would continue to be required to make daily cash payments of variation margin on its futures positions.

In addition, it is impossible to forecast with precision the market value of a security at the expiration or maturity of a forward or futures contract. Accordingly, it may be necessary to purchase additional foreign currency on the spot market (and bear the expense of such purchase) if the market value of the security being hedged is less than the amount of foreign currency the Fund is obligated to deliver and if a decision is made to sell the security and make delivery of the foreign currency. Conversely, it may be necessary to sell on the spot market some of the foreign currency received upon the sale of the hedged portfolio security if the market value of such security exceeds the amount of foreign currency the Fund is obligated to deliver.

## **Swaps**

The Fund may use swaps to enhance returns and manage risk. The Fund's use of swaps involves risks different from, or possibly greater than, the risks associated with investing directly in securities and other traditional investments. These risks included (i) the risk that the counterparty to a derivative transaction may not fulfill its contractual obligations; (ii) the risk of mispricing or improper valuation; and (iii) the risk that changes in the value of the derivative may not correlate perfectly with the underlying asset, rate, or index. Derivative prices are highly volatile and may fluctuate substantially during a short period of time. Such prices are influenced by numerous factors that affect the markets, including, but not limited to changing supply and demand relationships; government programs and policies; national and international political and economic events, changes in interest rates, and inflation and deflation. Trading derivative instruments involves risks different from, or possibly greater than, risks associated with investing directly in securities. Derivative contracts ordinarily have leverage inherent in their terms. The low margin deposits normally required in trading derivatives, including futures contracts, permit a high degree of leverage. Accordingly, a relatively small price movement may result in an immediate and substantial loss to the Fund. The use over leverage may also cause the Fund to liquidate portfolio positions when it would not be advantageous to do so in order to satisfy its obligations or to meet collateral segregations requirements. The use of leveraged derivatives can magnify the Fund's potential for loss and, therefore, amplify the effects of market volatility on the Fund's share price.

## **Regulatory Risk**

The regulation of derivatives is a rapidly changing area of law and is subject to modification by government and judicial action. In addition, the SEC, CFTC and the exchanges are authorized to take extraordinary actions in the event of a market emergency, including, for example, the implementation or reduction of speculative position limits, the implementation of higher margin requirements, the establishment of daily price limits and the suspension of trading.

It is not possible to predict fully the effects of current or future regulation. However, it is possible that developments in government regulation of various types of derivative instruments, such as speculative position limits on certain types of derivatives, or limits or restrictions on the counterparties with which the Fund engages in derivative transactions, may limit or prevent the Fund from using or limit the Fund's use of these instruments effectively as a part of its investment strategy, and could adversely affect the Fund's ability to achieve its investment objective. The Trust will continue to monitor developments in the area, particularly to the extent regulatory changes affect the Fund's ability to enter into desired swap agreements. New requirements, even if not directly applicable to the Fund, may increase the cost of the Fund's investments and cost of doing business.

## **OTHER TRANSACTIONS/INVESTMENT RISKS**

### **Government Intervention and Extreme Volatility Risk**

In the past, instability in the financial markets led the U.S. Government and other governments to take a number of unprecedented actions designed to support certain financial institutions and segments of the financial markets that experienced extreme volatility, and in some cases lack of liquidity. Federal, state, and other governments, their regulatory agencies, or self-regulatory organizations could take actions that affect the regulation of the instruments in which the Fund invests, or the issuers of such instruments, in ways that are unforeseeable. Legislation or regulation may also change the way in which the Fund itself is regulated. Such legislation or regulation could limit or preclude the Fund's ability to achieve its investment objective.

Reduced liquidity in credit and fixed-income markets may adversely affect many issuers worldwide. Reduced liquidity may result in less money being available to purchase raw materials, goods, and services from emerging markets, which may, in turn, bring down the prices of these economic staples. It may also result in emerging market issuers having more difficulty obtaining financing, which may, in turn, cause a decline in their stock prices. If they arise, these issues may have an adverse effect on the Fund.

### **Leverage Risk**

Leverage risk is created when an investment exposes the Fund to a level of risk that exceeds the amount invested. Changes in the value of such an investment magnify the Fund's risk of loss and potential for gain.

Some transactions may give rise to a form of leverage. These transactions may include, among others, derivatives and reverse repurchase agreements, and may expose the Fund to greater risk and increase its costs. When transactions create leverage, adverse changes in the value or level of the underlying asset, reference rate or index can result in a loss substantially greater than the amount invested in the derivatives or other instruments themselves. Certain transactions have the potential for unlimited loss, regardless of the size of the initial investments. Increases and decreases in the value of the securities held by the Fund and therefore in the Fund's NAV will be magnified when the Fund uses leverage because leverage tends to increase the Fund's exposure to market risk, interest rate risk or other risks by, in effect, increasing assets available for investment.

### **LIBOR Transition Risk**

The Fund may invest in financial instruments (including variable or floating rate loans, debt securities, and derivatives such as interest rate futures) that recently transitioned from, or continue to have exposure to LIBOR, which was the offered rate for short-term Eurodollar deposits between major international banks. LIBOR was a common benchmark interest rate index used to make adjustments to variable-rate loans and to determine interest rates for a variety of financial instruments and borrowing arrangements.

The United Kingdom Financial Conduct Authority ("FCA") ceased publication of the majority of LIBOR rates. The FCA has announced that some synthetic U.S. dollar LIBOR rates will be available exclusively for non-U.S. contracts that previously referenced LIBOR until September 30, 2024, but any such rates would be considered non-representative of the underlying market. Regulators and financial industry working groups have worked to identify alternative reference rates ("ARRs") to replace LIBOR and to assist with the transition to new ARRs. The continued transition away from LIBOR could result in increased volatility and uncertainty in markets tied to LIBOR. There is no assurance that the composition or characteristics of any ARR will be similar to or produce the same value or economic equivalence as LIBOR or that instruments using an alternative rate will have the same volume or liquidity. While the transition process away from LIBOR has become increasingly well-defined, the transition might lead to increased volatility and reduced liquidity in markets that historically relied on LIBOR to determine interest rates; a reduction in the value of some LIBOR-based investments; increased difficulty in borrowing or refinancing and diminished effectiveness of any applicable hedging strategies against instruments whose terms previously included LIBOR; and/or costs incurred in connection with temporary borrowings and closing out positions and entering into new agreements. Additionally, while some "legacy" LIBOR-based instruments may have contemplated a scenario where LIBOR is no longer available by providing for an alternative or "fallback" rate-setting methodology, there may be significant uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of any such alternative methodologies to replicate LIBOR. Not all LIBOR-based instruments had such fallback provisions and there remains uncertainty regarding the willingness and ability of issuers to add alternative rate-setting provisions in certain existing instruments.

On December 16, 2022, the Federal Reserve Board adopted regulations implementing the Adjustable Interest Rate Act. The regulations provide a statutory fallback mechanism to replace LIBOR in certain financial contracts after June 30, 2023, by identifying benchmark rates based on the Secured Overnight Financing Rate ("SOFR"), which is a broad measure of the cost of overnight borrowing of cash through repurchase agreements collateralized by U.S. Treasury securities. These regulations apply only to contracts governed by U.S. law, among other limitations. The regulations include provisions that (i) provide a safe harbor for selection or use of a replacement benchmark rate selected by the Federal Reserve Board; (ii) clarify who may choose the replacement benchmark rate selected by the Federal Reserve Board; and (iii) ensure that contracts adopting a replacement benchmark rate selected by the Federal Reserve Board will not be interrupted or terminated following the replacement of LIBOR; however there remains significant uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of any such legislation. Irrespective of the statutory fallback mechanism, SOFR has been used increasingly on a voluntary basis in new instruments and transactions.

## INVESTMENT RESTRICTIONS

### FUNDAMENTAL INVESTMENT RESTRICTIONS

The Fund has adopted the following fundamental investment restrictions that may not be changed without approval by a “majority of the outstanding shares” of the Fund which, as used in this SAI, means the vote of the lesser of (a) 67% or more of the shares of the Fund represented at a meeting, if the holders of more than 50% of the outstanding shares of the Fund are present or represented by proxy, or (b) more than 50% of the outstanding shares of the Fund. The investment restrictions pertain to the Fund unless otherwise noted. The Fund will consider the investments of underlying investment companies when determining compliance with its own policy on concentration. The Fund:

1. May not invest more than 25% of its total net assets in a particular industry or group of industries as concentration is defined under the 1940 Act, the rules or regulations thereunder, as such statute, rules or regulations may be amended from time to time, or any applicable exemptive relief except that the Fund may concentrate its investments in a particular industry or group of industries to the extent that the Fund’s Underlying Index concentrates in an industry or group of industries.
2. May issue senior securities to the extent permitted by the 1940 Act, the rules or regulations thereunder, as such statute, rules or regulations may be amended from time to time, or any applicable exemptive relief.
3. May lend or borrow money to the extent permitted by the 1940 Act, the rules or regulations thereunder, as such statute, rules or regulations may be amended from time to time, or any applicable exemptive relief.
4. May purchase or sell commodities, commodities contracts, futures contracts, or real estate to the extent permitted by the 1940 Act, the rules or regulations thereunder, as such statute, rules or regulations may be amended from time to time, or any applicable exemptive relief.
5. May underwrite securities to the extent permitted by the 1940 Act, or the rules or regulations thereunder, as such statute, rules or regulations may be amended from time to time, or any applicable exemptive relief.
6. May pledge, mortgage or hypothecate any of its assets to the extent permitted by the 1940 Act, or the rules or regulations thereunder, as such statute, rules or regulations may be amended from time to time, or any applicable exemptive relief.
7. May purchase securities of any issuer only when consistent with the maintenance of its status as a diversified company under the 1940 Act, the rules or regulations thereunder, as such statute, rules or regulations may be amended from time to time, or any applicable exemptive relief.

Under the 1940 Act, and the rules, regulations, and interpretations thereunder, a “diversified company,” as to 75% of its total assets, may not purchase securities of any issuer (other than obligations of, or guaranteed by, the U.S. Government, its agencies or its instrumentalities and securities of other investment companies) if, as a result, more than 5% of the value of its total assets would be invested in the securities of such issuer or more than 10% of the issuer’s voting securities would be held by the fund. The 1940 Act limits the ability of investment companies to lend money and to underwrite securities. The 1940 Act currently prohibits an open-end fund from issuing senior securities, as defined in the 1940 Act, except under very limited circumstances.

If a restriction on the Fund’s investments is adhered to at the time an investment is made, a subsequent change in the percentage of Fund assets invested in certain securities or other instruments resulting from changes in the value of the Fund’s total assets, will not be considered a violation of the restriction, with the exception of the Fund’s limitations on borrowing as described herein or unless otherwise noted herein.

Additionally, the 1940 Act limits the Fund’s ability to borrow money by prohibiting the Fund from issuing senior securities, except the Fund may borrow from any bank provided that immediately after any such borrowing there is an asset coverage of at least 300% for all borrowings by the Fund and provided further, that in the event that such asset coverage shall at any time fall below 300%, the Fund shall, within three days thereafter or such longer period as the SEC may prescribe by rules and regulations, reduce the amount of its borrowings to such an extent that the asset coverage of such borrowing shall be at least 300%.

*Regulatory Compliance.* The Fund may follow non-fundamental operational policies that are more restrictive than its fundamental investment limitations, as set forth in the Prospectus and this SAI, in order to comply with applicable laws and regulations, including the provisions of and regulations under the 1940 Act. The Fund may change these operational policies to reflect changes in the laws and regulations without the approval of its shareholders.

## NON-FUNDAMENTAL INVESTMENT RESTRICTIONS

The Fund’s investment objective is non-fundamental and may be changed by the Board without shareholder approval upon 60 days’ prior written notice to the Fund’s shareholders.

The Fund has adopted the following non-fundamental investment restrictions which may be changed by the Board without the approval of the relevant Fund’s shareholders. Any changes in the Fund’s non-fundamental limitations will be communicated to the Fund’s shareholders prior to effectiveness.

- The Fund may not pledge, mortgage, or hypothecate assets, except to secure temporary borrowings permitted by the Fund’s fundamental limitation, in aggregate amounts not to exceed 15% of total assets taken at current value at the time of the incidence of such loan, except as permitted with respect to securities lending.
- The Fund will invest at least 80% of its assets in securities of the Nasdaq 7HANDL™ Index.

## MANAGEMENT

### Trustees and Officers

The following tables provide information about the Board and the senior officers of the Trust. The Board is composed of three Trustees, two of whom are not “interested persons” of the Trust, as that term is defined in the 1940 Act (each an “Independent Trustee” and collectively, the “Independent Trustees”). Each Trustee oversees all portfolios of the Trust and serves for an indefinite term (subject to mandatory retirement provisions). Information about each Trustee is provided below and includes each person’s: name, address, age (as of the date of the Fund’s most recent fiscal year end), present position(s) held with the Trust, principal occupations for the past five years, and total compensation received as a Trustee for the most recent fiscal year. Unless otherwise noted, the business address of each person listed below is c/o Strategy Shares, 36 North New York Avenue, Huntington, NY 11743. Unless otherwise noted, each officer is elected annually by the Board. Each Trustee and several officers also serve in the same capacity for Mutual Fund and Variable Insurance Trust, an open-end investment company whose series are managed by the Advisor. Collectively, the Trust, Mutual Fund and Variable Insurance Trust, Catalyst Strategic Income Opportunities Fund, and Mutual Fund Series Trust constitute the “Fund Complex.”

### Independent Trustees Background

Name, Address and Year of Birth	Position with the Trust	Term of Office and Length of Time Served*	Principal Occupation(s) During Past 5 Years	Number of Portfolios in Fund Complex Overseen by Trustee	Other Directorships Held by Trustee
Tobias Caldwell Year of Birth: 1967	Chairman of the Board and Trustee	Since 2016	Manager, Genovese Family Enterprises, LLC (and affiliates, family office) 1999-present, Managing Member, Bear Properties, LLC (real estate firm) (2006-present).	51	Chairman of the Board, Mutual Fund and Variable Insurance Trust since 2016; Lead independent Trustee and Chairman of Audit Committee and Nominating Committee, Mutual Fund Series Trust since 2006; Trustee of IDX Funds Trust (formerly, M3Sixty Funds Trust) since 2016; Chairman of the Board, Catalyst

<b>Name, Address and Year of Birth</b>	<b>Position with the Trust</b>	<b>Term of Office and Length of Time Served*</b>	<b>Principal Occupation(s) During Past 5 Years</b>	<b>Number of Portfolios in Fund Complex Overseen by Trustee</b>	<b>Other Directorships Held by Trustee</b>
					Strategic Income Opportunities Fund since April 2024; Chairman of the Board of AlphaCentric Prime Meridian Income Fund from 2018 to August 2023.
Stephen P. Lachenauer Year of Birth: 1967	Trustee and Chair of the Audit, Risk and Compliance, and Investment Committees	Trustee and Chair of Audit, Risk and Compliance Committees since 2016  Chair of Investment Committee since November 2020	Attorney, private practice since 2010.	51	Trustee and Chair of the Audit and Risk and Compliance Committees since 2016, and Chair of the Investment Committee since November 2020, Mutual Fund and Variable Insurance Trust; Trustee and Chair of the Audit and Risk and Compliance Committees from 2018 to 2023, and Chair of the Investment Committee from 2020 to 2023, AlphaCentric Prime Meridian Income Fund; Trustee, Mutual Fund Series Trust since April 2022; Trustee and Chairman of the Audit Committee, Catalyst Strategic Income Opportunities Fund since April 2024.

\* The term of office of each Trustee is indefinite.

#### Interested Trustee Background

<b>Name, Address and Year of Birth</b>	<b>Position with the Trust</b>	<b>Term of Office and Length of Time Served*</b>	<b>Principal Occupation(s) During Past 5 Years</b>	<b>Number of Portfolios in Fund Complex Overseen by Trustee</b>	<b>Other Directorships Held by Trustee</b>
Donald McIntosh** Year of Birth: 1967	Trustee	Since 2016	Internal Audit Supervisor, Santander Bank, since 2021; Commercial Banking Business Control	14	Trustee, Mutual Fund and Variable Insurance Trust since 2016; Trustee, AlphaCentric Prime Meridian Income Fund 2018 to 2023.

<b>Name, Address and Year of Birth</b>	<b>Position with the Trust</b>	<b>Term of Office and Length of Time Served*</b>	<b>Principal Occupation(s) During Past 5 Years</b>	<b>Number of Portfolios in Fund Complex Overseen by Trustee</b>	<b>Other Directorships Held by Trustee</b>
			Officer, Santander Bank, 2017-2021.		

\* The term of office of each Trustee is indefinite.

\*\* Mr. McIntosh is considered an interested person of the Trust by reason of a financial connection between certain of his family members and management personnel of the Advisor.

#### **Officers\***

<b>Name, Address, Year of Birth</b>	<b>Position(s) Held with Trust</b>	<b>Term and Length Served</b>	<b>Principal Occupation(s) During Past 5 Years</b>
Michael Schoonover 53 Palmeras St. Suite 601 San Juan, PR 00901 Year of Birth: 1983	President	Since 2022	Vice President of the Trust, 2018-2021; Chief Operating Officer (“COO”), Catalyst Capital Advisors LLC and Rational Advisors, Inc. since 2017; Portfolio Manager, Catalyst Capital Advisors LLC, 2013 – May 2021; President, MFund Distributors LLC since January 2020; COO, Catalyst International Advisors LLC, since 2019; COO, Insights Media LLC since 2019; COO, MFund Management LLC since 2019; COO, AlphaCentric Advisors LLC since January 2021.
Alex Merino 53 Palmeras St. Suite 601 San Juan, PR 00901 Year of Birth: 1985	Vice President	Since 2022	Investment Operations Manager, MFund Management LLC since 2022; Investment Operations Analyst, MFund Management LLC, 2020--2021; Tax Senior Associate, PwC Asset & Wealth Management NY Metro, 2016—2019.
James Szilagyi Year of Birth: 1963	Treasurer	Since 2016	Product Manager, Rational Advisors, Inc., since 2016.
Frederick J. Schmidt Year of Birth: 1959	Chief Compliance Officer	Since 2016	Director of Compliance Services, MFund Services LLC since 2015.
Jennifer A. Bailey Year of Birth: 1968	Secretary	Since 2016	Director of Legal Services, MFund Services LLC since 2012.

\* Officers do not receive any compensation from the Trust.



## Compensation of the Board

The Trustees are paid a quarterly retainer, and receive compensation for each committee meeting, telephonic Board meeting, and special in-person Board meeting attended. Officers receive no compensation from the Trust. The Trust reimburses each of the Trustees for travel and other expenses incurred in connection with attendance at such meetings. The Trust has no retirement or pension plans.

The following table describes the compensation that the Trust and the Fund Complex paid to the Trustees of the Trust during the fiscal year ended April 30, 2024.

<b>Name of Trustee</b>	<b>Compensation from the Trust</b>	<b>Compensation from the Fund Complex<sup>2</sup></b>
Tobias Caldwell	\$41,100	\$ 305,950
Stephen Lachenauer	\$ 43,100	\$ 261,950
Donald McIntosh	\$ 25,300	\$ 60,300 <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Does not include compensation from Mutual Fund Series Trust or Catalyst Strategic Income Opportunities Fund, of which he does not serve on the Board.

<sup>2</sup> During the period reflected in the table above, the “Fund Complex” also included the AlphaCentric Prime Meridian Income Fund (“ACPMIF”). ACPMIF was deregistered as a closed-end investment company with the SEC on August 23, 2023 and liquidated on September 1, 2023.

## TRUSTEE OWNERSHIP OF SHARES IN THE FUND AND IN THE FUND COMPLEX AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2023

<b>Name of Trustee</b>	<b>Dollar Range of Shares Owned in the Fund</b>	<b>Dollar Range of Shares Owned in the Fund Complex</b>
Tobias Caldwell	None	Over \$100,000
Stephen Lachenauer	\$10,001-\$50,000	Over \$100,000
Donald McIntosh	None	None <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Does not include ownership of shares in Mutual Fund Series Trust or Catalyst Strategic Income Opportunities Fund, of which he does not serve on the Board.

As of December 31, 2023, none of the Trustees (including their immediate family members) owned beneficially or of record securities of the Advisor or the Distributor or any entity directly or indirectly controlling, controlled by, or under common control with the Advisor or Distributor.

## Qualifications and Experience of the Trustees

The following provides an overview of the considerations that led the Board to conclude that each individual serving as a Trustee of the Trust should so serve. Generally, no one factor was decisive in the original selection of an individual to join the Board. Among the factors the Board considered when concluding that an individual should serve on the Board were the following: (1) the individual’s business and professional experience and accomplishments; (2) the individual’s prior experience serving on the boards of public companies, and other complex enterprises and organizations; and (3) how the individual’s skills, experience, and attributes would contribute to an appropriate mix of relevant skills and experience on the Board.

In respect of each current Trustee, the individual’s substantial professional accomplishments and prior experience, including, in some cases, in fields related to the operations of the Trust, were a significant factor in the determination that the individual should serve as a Trustee of the Trust.

In addition to the information set forth above, the following sets forth additional information about the qualifications and experience of each of the Trustees that lead to the conclusion that each Trustee should serve as Trustee of the Trust.

### **Tobias Caldwell**

Mr. Caldwell is the manager of a real estate investment firm. Mr. Caldwell has served on the boards of mutual funds for over ten years, including as chair of the audit committee for over ten years. Mr. Caldwell also serves as a Trustee of other registered investment companies in the Fund Complex. His experience in the real estate and investment industries provides the Board with an additional perspective and understanding of investment strategies used by advisors to the funds.

### **Stephen Lachenauer**

Mr. Lachenauer has been an attorney in private practice for over fifteen years, providing advice and counsel to small businesses and individuals on real estate, commercial contracts, general business, and financial matters. Mr. Lachenauer's previous experience at large law firms and as an attorney at a large investment bank provides the Board with knowledge of financial and investment regulatory matters. Mr. Lachenauer also serves on the boards of other registered investment companies in the Fund Complex.

### **Donald McIntosh**

Mr. McIntosh is a Business Control & Risk Management Officer for a large international financial services company, and he has many years of credit analysis and loan servicing experience. Mr. McIntosh's experience in evaluating companies' financial condition would provide the Board with knowledge about investment strategies used by the advisors of the funds. Mr. McIntosh also serves as a Trustee of other registered investment companies in the Fund Complex.

### **Board Structure**

The Board is responsible for overseeing the management and operations of the Trust. The Board consists of three Trustees, two of whom are Independent Trustees. The Chairperson of the Trust, Tobias Caldwell, is an Independent Trustee.

The Board holds four regular meetings each year to consider and address matters involving the Fund. The Board also may hold special meetings to address matters arising between regular meetings. In addition, the Trustees regularly meet outside the presence of management and are advised by independent legal counsel. These meetings may take place in-person or by telephone.

The Board reviews its structure regularly and believes that its leadership structure, including two Independent Trustees is appropriate and in the best interests of the Trust, given its specific characteristics. The Board also believes its leadership structure facilitates the orderly and efficient flow of information to the Trustees from Trust management.

When considering potential nominees to fill vacancies on the Board, and as part of its annual self-evaluation, the Board reviews the mix of skills and other relevant experiences of the Trustees.

### **Committees of the Board**

The Board has three standing committees: the Audit Committee, the Risk and Compliance Committee, and the Investment Committee.

**Audit Committee.** The Audit Committee is currently comprised of Mr. Caldwell and Mr. Lachenauer. The primary function of the Audit Committee is to assist the full Board in fulfilling its oversight responsibilities to the shareholders and the investment community relating to fund accounting, reporting practices and the quality and integrity of the financial reports. To satisfy these responsibilities, the Audit Committee reviews with the independent auditors the audit plan and results and recommendations following independent audits, reviews the performance of the independent auditors and recommends engagement or discharge of the auditors to the full Board, reviews the independence of the independent auditors, reviews the adequacy of the Fund's internal controls and prepares and submits Committee meeting minutes and supporting documentation to the full Board. The Audit Committee met three times during the fiscal year ended April 30, 2024.

**Risk and Compliance Committee.** The Risk and Compliance Committee is comprised of each of the Trustees. The Risk and Compliance Committee is responsible for general oversight of the Trust's compliance with the legal and regulatory requirements of the Trust's operations. The Risk and Compliance Committee also serves as a means to provide feedback and

guidance to the Trust's Chief Compliance Officer ("CCO") and assists the Board in identifying and managing risks. The Risk and Compliance Committee met four times during the fiscal year ended April 30, 2024.

**Investment Committee.** The Investment Committee is comprised of each of the Trustees. The primary purpose of the Investment Committee is to oversee and guide the process by which the Board evaluates the investment performance of each of the Trust's series. The Investment Committee also considers and evaluates each investment advisor or sub-advisor (including unaffiliated sub-advisors) or portfolio manager framework for identifying, prioritizing, and managing investment risk. The Investment Committee met twice during the fiscal year ended April 30, 2024.

### **Board Oversight of Risk**

An integral part of the Board's overall responsibility for overseeing the management and operations of the Trust is the Board's oversight of the risk management of the Trust's investment programs and business affairs. The Fund is subject to a number of risks, such as investment risk, valuation risk, risk of operational failure or lack of business continuity, and legal, compliance and regulatory risk. The Fund, the Advisor, and other service providers to the Trust have implemented various processes, procedures, and controls to identify risks to the Fund, to lessen the probability of their occurrence, and to mitigate any adverse effect should they occur. Different processes, procedures, and controls are employed with respect to different types of risks.

The Board exercises oversight of the risk management process through the Risk and Compliance Committee and through oversight by the Board itself. The Board holds four regular meetings each year to consider and address matters involving the Fund.

In addition to adopting, and periodically reviewing, policies and procedures designed to address risks to the Fund, the Board requires management of the Advisor and the Trust, including the Trust's Chief Compliance Officer ("CCO"), to report to the Board and the Risk and Compliance Committee of the Board on a variety of matters, including matters relating to risk management, at regular and special meetings. The Board and the Audit Committee receive regular reports from the Trust's independent public accountants on internal control and financial reporting matters. On at least a quarterly basis, the Independent Trustees meet with the Trust's CCO, including outside the presence of management, to discuss issues related to compliance. Furthermore, the Board receives a quarterly report from the Trust's CCO regarding the operation of the compliance policies and procedures of the Trust and its primary service providers. The Board monitors the Fund's investment policies and procedures as well as valuation of the Fund's securities. The Board also receives quarterly reports from the Advisor on the investments and securities trading of the Fund, including its investment performance compared to appropriate benchmarks, as well as reports regarding the valuation of the Fund's securities. The Board also receives reports from the Trust's primary service providers regarding their operations as they relate to the Fund.

The Board also considers liquidity risk management issues as part of its general oversight responsibilities and oversees the Fund's liquidity risk through, among other things, receiving periodic reporting and presentations by the Liquidity Risk Management ("LRM") Program Administrator that address liquidity matters. As required by Rule 22e-4 under the 1940 Act, the Board, including a majority of the Independent Trustees, has approved the Trust's LRM Program, which is reasonably designed to assess and manage the Trust's liquidity risk, and has appointed the LRM Program Administrator that is responsible for administering the LRM Program. The Board also reviews, no less frequently than annually, a written report prepared by the LRM Program Administrator that addresses, among other items, the operation of the program and assesses its adequacy and effectiveness of implementation.

## **SERVICE PROVIDERS**

### **INVESTMENT ADVISORY SERVICES**

#### **Investment Advisor**

Rational Advisors, Inc. has been retained by the Trust under a Management Agreement to act as the investment advisor to the Fund, subject to the authority of the Board. The Advisor (formerly a wholly owned subsidiary of Huntington National Bank and known as Huntington Asset Advisors, Inc.) was organized under the laws of Ohio in 2001. The Advisor oversees the day-to-day investment decisions for the Fund and continuously reviews, supervises, and administers the Fund's investment programs. The address of the Advisor is 53 Palmeras St. Suite 601, San Juan, PR 00901. The Advisor is under common control with Catalyst Capital Advisors LLC and AlphaCentric Advisors LLC, the investment advisors of other funds in the same

group of investment companies also known as a “fund complex” and MFund Services LLC, which provides management and legal support and compliance services to the Fund.

The Management Agreement provides that the Advisor will provide each Fund with investment advice and supervision and will continuously furnish an investment program for the Fund consistent with the investment objectives and policies of the Fund. The Advisor is responsible for the payment of the salaries and expenses of all of its personnel, office rent and the expenses of providing investment advisory and related clerical expenses.

Under the terms of the Management Agreement, the Advisor manages the investment of the assets of each Fund in conformity with the investment objective and policies of the Fund. It is the responsibility of the Advisor to make investment decisions for each Fund and to provide continuous supervision of the investment portfolio of the Fund.

For its services under the Management Agreement, the Advisor is paid monthly management fees at the annual rate of 0.60% of the average daily net assets of the Fund. The Advisor pays expenses incurred by it in connection with acting as advisor, other than costs (including taxes and brokerage commissions, borrowing costs, costs of investing in underlying funds and extraordinary expenses, if any) of securities purchased for the Fund and other expenses paid by the Fund as detailed in the Management Agreement. The Advisor pays for all employees, office space and facilities required by it to provide services under the Management Agreement, except for specific items of expense referred to below.

Except for the expenses described above that have been assumed by the Advisor, all expenses incurred in administration of the Fund will be charged to the Fund, including investment management fees; fees and expenses of the Board; interest charges; taxes; brokerage commissions; expenses of valuing assets; expenses of continuing registration and qualification of the Fund and the shares under federal and state law; share issuance expenses; fees and disbursements of independent accountants and legal counsel; fees and expenses of custodians, including sub-custodians and securities depositories, transfer agents and shareholder account servicing organizations; expenses of preparing, printing and mailing prospectuses, reports, proxies, notices and statements sent to shareholders; expenses of shareholder meetings; costs of investing in underlying funds; and insurance premiums. The Fund is also liable for nonrecurring expenses, including litigation to which it may from time to time be a party. Expenses incurred for the operation of the Fund, including the expenses of communications with its shareholders, are paid by the Fund.

The Advisor has contractually agreed to waive all or a portion of its investment advisory fee (based on average daily net assets) and/or reimburse certain operating expenses of the Fund to the extent necessary in order to limit the Fund’s total annual fund operating expenses (but excluding: (i) acquired fund fees and expenses; (ii) brokerage commissions and trading costs; (iii) interest (including borrowing costs and overdraft charges); (iv) taxes; (v) short sale dividends and interest expenses; and (vi) non-routine or extraordinary expenses, such as regulatory inquiry and litigation expenses) to not more than 0.80% of the average daily net assets of the Fund through August 31, 2025. The expense limitation agreement shall terminate automatically upon the termination of the Management Agreement. Under certain conditions, the Advisor may recoup management fees that it waived or Fund expenses that it paid under this agreement for a period of up to three years from the date the fees were waived and/or expenses paid, provided such recoupment can be achieved without causing the expense ratio (after the recoupment is taken into account) to exceed (i) the expense limit in effect at the time the fees were waived or expenses paid, or (ii) the expense limit in place at the time of recoupment. The Advisor may elect in its discretion to terminate this Agreement with respect to the Fund for any period following the term period of the Agreement, but no such termination shall affect the obligation (including the amount of the obligation) of the Fund to repay amounts of waived fees or reimbursed expenses with respect to periods prior to such termination.

The Management Agreement with the Fund was in effect for an initial two-year term and then continues from year to year as long as its continuation is approved at least annually by the Board, including a majority of the Trustees who are not “interested persons,” or by the shareholders of the Fund. The Management Agreement may be terminated at any time upon 60 days’ written notice by the Fund or by a majority vote of the outstanding shares or 90 days’ written notice by the Advisor and will terminate automatically upon assignment. A discussion of the matters considered by the Board in connection with the renewal of the Management Agreement with respect to the Fund is available in the Fund’s Annual Report to Shareholders for the fiscal year ended April 30, 2024.

The Management Agreement provides that the Advisor shall not be liable for any error of judgment or mistake of law or for any loss suffered by the Trust in connection with the performance of its duties, except a loss resulting from a breach of fiduciary duty with respect to the receipt of compensation for services or a loss resulting from willful misfeasance, bad faith,

or gross negligence on the part of the Advisor in the performance of its duties, or from reckless disregard of its duties and obligations thereunder.

From time to time, the Advisor may use a portion of its reasonable resources and profits to pay for certain administrative services provided by financial institutions for Shares of the Fund.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING PORTFOLIO MANAGERS

David Miller and Charles Ashley are jointly and primarily responsible for the day-to-day management of the Fund.

### Other Accounts Under Management

As of April 30, 2024, the number of, and total assets in all other registered investment companies, other pooled investment vehicles, and other accounts overseen by the Fund's portfolio managers were as follows:

<b>Other Accounts Managed By David Miller</b>	<b>Total Number of Other Accounts Managed/ Total Assets</b>
Registered Investment Companies	7/\$1.5 billion
Other Pooled Investment Vehicles	0/\$0
Other Accounts	0/\$0

<b>Other Accounts Managed By Charles Ashley</b>	<b>Total Number of Other Accounts Managed/ Total Assets</b>
Registered Investment Companies	5/\$1.5 billion
Other Pooled Investment Vehicles	0/\$0
Other Accounts	0/\$0

None of the accounts above are subject to performance-based fees.

### Ownership of Fund Shares

The table below shows the portfolio managers' ownership of the Fund's shares as of April 30, 2024.

<b>Portfolio Manager</b>	<b>Dollar Range of Equity Securities in the Fund</b>
David Miller	None
Charles Ashley	None

### Compensation

Mr. Miller's compensation from the Advisor is based on a percentage of the overall profits of the Advisor. He is also entitled to a portion of the proceeds if the Advisor sells all or a portion of the Advisor's business. He also participates in the Advisor's pension plan. Mr. Ashley's compensation from the Advisor is a fixed base salary and a discretionary bonus based on the discretion of the Advisor.

### Conflicts of Interest

Actual or apparent conflicts of interest may arise when a portfolio manager has day-to-day management responsibilities with respect to more than one fund or other accounts. The management of multiple accounts may result in a portfolio manager devoting unequal time and attention to the management of each account. The management of multiple funds and accounts also may give rise to potential conflicts of interest if the funds and accounts have different objectives, benchmarks, time horizons, and fees as the portfolio manager must allocate his time and investment ideas across multiple funds and accounts.

With respect to securities transactions for the Fund, the Advisor determines which broker to use to execute each order, consistent with the duty to seek best execution of the transaction. The portfolio manager may execute transactions for another

fund or account that may adversely impact the value of securities held by the Fund. Securities selected for funds or accounts other than the Fund may outperform the securities selected for the Fund.

The appearance of a conflict of interest may arise where the Advisor has an incentive, such as a performance-based management fee. The management of personal accounts may give rise to potential conflicts of interest; there is no assurance that the Fund's code of ethics will adequately address such conflicts. One of the portfolio manager's numerous responsibilities is to assist in the sale of Fund shares. Because the portfolio manager's compensation is indirectly linked to the sale of Fund shares, they may have an incentive to devote time to marketing efforts designed to increase sales of Fund shares.

The Fund has adopted a code of ethics that, among other things, permits personal trading by employees under conditions where it has been determined that such trades would not adversely impact client accounts. Nevertheless, the management of personal accounts may give rise to potential conflicts of interest, and there is no assurance that these codes of ethics will adequately address such conflicts.

The Fund may invest in affiliated funds advised by the Advisor. The Advisor is subject to conflicts of interest in allocating the Fund's assets among the affiliated funds. The Advisor will receive more revenue when it selects an affiliated fund rather than an unaffiliated fund for inclusion in the Fund's portfolio. This conflict may provide an incentive for the Advisor to invest Fund assets in affiliated funds that perform less well than unaffiliated funds. The Advisor may have an incentive to allocate the Fund's assets to those affiliated funds for which the net advisory fees payable to the Advisor are higher than the fees payable by other affiliated funds.

The Advisor and the Fund have each adopted certain compliance procedures which are designed to address these types of conflicts. However, there is no guarantee that such procedures will detect each and every situation in which a conflict arises.

## **DISTRIBUTION SERVICES**

### **Distributor**

Forside Fund Services, LLC, located at Three Canal Plaza, Suite 100, Portland, Maine 04101, serves as the distributor in connection with the continuous offering of the Fund's shares. The Distributor is a broker-dealer registered with the SEC under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 and a member of the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority. The Trust offers Shares of the Fund for sale through the Distributor in Creation Units. The Distributor will not accept purchase or sell orders in quantities less than Creation Units. The Distributor will deliver a Prospectus to persons purchasing Creation Units and will maintain records of Creation Unit orders placed and confirmations furnished by it. Pursuant to a Distribution Services Agreement, the Advisor pays the Distributor for distribution-related services.

### **Rule 12b-1 Plan**

The Trust has adopted but has yet to implement a Rule 12b-1 Distribution Plan (the "Plan"). Under the Plan, the Fund is authorized to pay an amount up to 0.25% of its average annual daily net assets for certain distribution-related services.

The Plan is designed to compensate financial intermediaries (including the Advisor and its affiliates) for activities principally intended to result in the sale of Fund shares such as advertising and marketing of shares (including printing and disseminating prospectuses and sales literature to prospective shareholders and financial intermediaries) and providing incentives to financial intermediaries to sell shares. The Plan is also designed to cover the cost of administrative services performed in conjunction with the sale of shares, including, but not limited to, shareholder services, recordkeeping services, and educational services, as well as the costs of implementing and operating the Plan. In accordance with the Plan, the Distributor may enter into agreements with financial intermediaries and dealers to provide these distribution and distribution-related services with respect to the Fund.

The Plan could benefit the Fund by helping the Fund attract and retain assets, thus providing securities and cash for orderly portfolio management.

Under the Plan, the Fund may compensate a financial intermediary more or less than its actual marketing and administrative expenses. In no event will the Fund pay for any expenses of a financial intermediary that exceed the maximum Plan fee.

No distribution fees are currently charged to the Fund and there are no plans to impose these fees. To the extent that the Plan is implemented in the future with respect to the Fund, the Prospectus will be updated to reflect the implementation and the implementation will also be disclosed on the Fund's website. The Board will pre-approve the implementation of the Plan.

## **FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION, TRANSFER AGENCY, AND FUND ACCOUNTING SERVICES**

Pursuant to a Services Agreement with Citi Fund Services Ohio, Inc., located at 4400 Easton Commons, Suite 200, Columbus, Ohio 43219, Citi provides financial administration, transfer agency, and fund accounting services to the Trust. As financial administrator, Citi performs certain services on behalf of the Trust including but not limited to: (1) preparing the Trust's periodic financial reports on forms prescribed by the SEC and filing those reports with the SEC upon review and approval of the Trust and Trust counsel; (2) calculating Fund expenses and making required disbursements; (3) calculating Fund performance data; and (4) providing certain compliance support services.

As fund accountant, Citi maintains certain financial records of the Trust and provides accounting services to the Fund that include the daily calculation of the Fund's NAV. Citi also performs certain other services on behalf of the Trust including providing financial information for the Trust's federal and state tax returns and financial reports required to be filed with the SEC. As Transfer Agent, Citi issues shares of each Fund in Creation Units to fill purchase orders for Fund shares, maintains records of the issuance and redemption of the Fund's shares, and acts as the Fund's dividend disbursing agent.

For the financial administration and fund accounting services provided to the Trust, the Trust has agreed to pay an annual fee equal to 0.04% of the aggregate net assets of the Fund, subject to certain breakpoints and minimum fee requirements.

**Support Services Agreement.** Citi has entered into a Support Services Agreement with the Advisor pursuant to which it prepares and provides facts sheets for the Fund and certain information required by the Advisor to determine the Fund's Creation Basket and estimated Cash Amount for each Business Day.

## **MANAGEMENT AND LEGAL ADMINISTRATION SERVICES**

MFund Services LLC ("MFund"), located at 36 North New York Avenue, Huntington, NY 11743, provides the Fund with various management and legal administrative services. For these services, each Fund pays MFund an annual asset-based fee equal to 0.03% of the first \$1 billion of the net assets of the Fund, and 0.02% thereafter, subject to a \$30,000 annual fee. In addition, each Fund reimburses MFund for any reasonable out-of-pocket expenses incurred in the performance of its duties under the Management Services Agreement. Jerry Szilagyi is the managing member of MFund, and President and controlling member of the Advisor.

### **Compliance Services**

Pursuant to a Compliance Services Agreement, MFund provides chief compliance officer services to the Trust and each of its series. For these services, the Trust pays MFund a monthly base fee plus an asset-based fee. In addition, the Trust reimburses MFund for any reasonable out-of-pocket expenses incurred in the performance of its duties under the Services Agreement. MFund receives compensation for chief compliance officer services at the contractual rate of \$1,200/month for the first series of the Trust, \$400 for each additional series, \$400 for each advisor, plus 0.0025% of the assets of each series per calendar year. Jerry Szilagyi is the managing member of MFund, and President and controlling member of the Advisor.

## **OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS**

### **Custodian**

Pursuant to a Custodial and Agency Services Agreement with the Trust, Citibank, N.A. ("Citibank"), located at 388 Greenwich Street, New York, NY 10048 serves as Custodian for each Fund and safeguards and holds the Fund's cash and securities, settles the Fund's securities transactions and collects income on Fund investments. Under the agreement, Citibank also: (1) provides data required by the Advisor to determine the Fund's Creation Basket and estimated Cash Amount for each Business Day (this services is paid for by the Advisor directly pursuant to the Support Services Agreement between Citi and the Advisor (see "Support Services Agreement," above)); (2) monitors the settlement of securities comprising the Creation Basket and any cash in connection with the purchase and redemption of Creation Units and requests the issuance of related Creation Units; (3) deposits securities comprising the Creation Basket and/or cash received from Authorized Participants in

connection with purchases of Creation Units into the Fund's custody and cash accounts; (4) disburses securities comprising the Creation Basket and/or cash from the Fund's custody and cash accounts to Authorized Participants in connection with the redemptions of Creation Units; and (5) performs certain other related services (see "Purchase and Redemption of Creation Units," below).

### **Independent Registered Public Accounting Firm**

The Fund's independent registered public accounting firm is Cohen & Company, Ltd., 1350 Euclid Ave., Suite 800, Cleveland, OH 44115. Shareholders will receive annual financial statements, together with a report of independent accountants, and semiannual unaudited financial statements of the Fund. Cohen & Company, Ltd. will report on the Fund's annual financial statements, review certain regulatory reports and the Fund's income tax returns, and perform other professional accounting, auditing, tax and advisory services when engaged to do so by the Fund.

### **Legal Counsel**

Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young, LLP, 2005 Market Street, Suite 2600, Philadelphia, PA 19103-7018, serves as counsel for the Trust and the Independent Trustees.

## **SUPPLEMENTAL PAYMENTS TO FINANCIAL INTERMEDIARIES**

Financial intermediaries that promote the sale of Fund shares may be paid fees out of the assets of, the Advisor and their affiliates (but not out of Fund assets).

Financial intermediaries who solicit the sale of Fund shares may receive fees for providing distribution-related, recordkeeping or shareholder services such as sponsoring sales, providing sales literature, conducting training seminars for employees, and engineering sales-related computer software programs and systems. Also, these financial intermediaries may be paid cash or promotional incentives, such as reimbursement of certain expenses relating to attendance at informational meetings about the Fund or other special events at recreational-type facilities, or items of material value. These payments will be based upon the amount of Fund shares the financial intermediary sells or may sell and/or upon the type and nature of sales or marketing support furnished by the financial intermediary.

From time to time, the Advisor and its affiliates, at their expense, may provide additional compensation to financial intermediaries that sell or arrange for the sale of Fund shares. Such compensation may include financial assistance to financial intermediaries that enable the Advisor and its affiliates to participate in or present at conferences or seminars, sales or training programs for invited employees, client and investor events and other financial intermediary-sponsored events.

The Advisor and its affiliates also may hold or sponsor, at their expense, sales events, conferences, and programs for employees or associated persons of financial intermediaries in order to facilitate the sale of Fund shares and may pay the travel and lodging expenses of attendees. The Advisor and its affiliates also may provide, at their expense, meals, and entertainment in conjunction with meetings with these financial intermediaries. Other compensation may be offered to the extent not prohibited by applicable laws, regulations, or the rules of any self-regulatory agency, such as FINRA.

## **PURCHASE AND REDEMPTION OF CREATION UNITS**

The Fund only offers and redeems its shares in Creation Units. The Fund will offer and sell Creation Units through the Distributor on a continuous basis, without a sales load (but subject to transaction fees), at the NAV per share next determined after an order in proper form is received by the Distributor. The NAV of each Fund is expected to be determined as of the close of regular trading on the Exchange (ordinarily 4:00 p.m. Eastern Time) on each Business Day ("NAV Calculation Time"). The Fund will sell and redeem Creation Units only on a Business Day.

The Trust generally does not offer its shares outside of the U.S.

### **IN-KIND TRANSACTIONS - GENERALLY**

In order to keep costs low and permit each Fund to be as fully invested as possible, shares of the Fund will be purchased and redeemed in Creation Units and generally on an in-kind basis. Accordingly, except where the purchase or redemption will



include cash under the circumstances described in this SAI (see “Cash Transactions – Generally,” below), investors will generally be required to purchase Creation Units by making an in-kind deposit of Deposit Instruments, and shareholders redeeming their shares will generally receive an in-kind transfer of Redemption Instruments. The names and quantities of the instruments that constitute the Deposit Instruments and the names and quantities of the instruments that constitute the Redemption Instruments will be specified by the Fund each day and these instruments may be referred to, in the case of either a purchase or a redemption, as the “Creation Basket.” In addition, under normal circumstances, the Creation Basket will generally correspond pro rata to the securities, assets or other positions held by the Fund on a Trade Date + 1 (“T+1”) settlement basis (including cash positions), except:<sup>1</sup>

1. in the case of bonds, for minor differences when it is impossible to break up bonds beyond certain minimum sizes needed for transfer and settlement;
2. for minor differences when rounding is necessary to eliminate fractional shares or lots that are not tradable round lots;<sup>2</sup>
3. positions that cannot be transferred in kind will be excluded from the Creation Basket;<sup>3</sup>
4. to the extent the Fund determines, on a given Business Day, to use a representative sampling of the Fund’s portfolio;<sup>4</sup> or
5. for temporary periods, to effect changes in the Fund’s portfolio as a result of the rebalancing of its Underlying Index (any such change, a “Rebalancing”).

If there is a difference between the NAV attributable to a Creation Unit and the aggregate market value of the Creation Basket exchanged for the Creation Unit (the “Difference”), the party conveying instruments with the lower value will also pay to the other cash equal in value to the Difference.

Each Business Day, before the open of trading on the Exchange (ordinarily 9:30 a.m., Eastern Time), the Fund will cause to be published through the NSCC the names and quantities of the instruments comprising the Creation Basket (based on Fund portfolio information as of the end of the prior Business Day), as well as the estimated Cash Amount (if any, effective through and including the previous Business Day), for that day.

## **CASH TRANSACTIONS – GENERALLY**

Purchases and redemptions of Creation Units may be made in whole or in part on a cash basis, rather than in kind, under certain circumstances, including:

- to the extent there is a Cash Amount;
- if, on a given Business Day, the Fund announces before the open of trading that all purchases, all redemptions, or all purchases and redemptions on that day will be made entirely in cash;
- if, upon receiving a purchase or redemption order from an Authorized Participant, the Fund determines to require the purchase or redemption, as applicable, to be made entirely in cash;
- if, on a given Business Day, the Fund requires all Authorized Participants purchasing or redeeming Fund shares on that day to deposit or receive (as applicable) cash in lieu of some or all of the Deposit Instruments or Redemption Instruments, respectively, solely because: (i) such instruments are not eligible for transfer through either the Clearing

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<sup>1</sup> The portfolio used for this purpose will be the same portfolio used to calculate the Fund’s NAV for that Business Day.

<sup>2</sup> A tradable round lot for a security will be the standard unit of trading in that particular type of security in its primary market.

<sup>3</sup> This includes instruments that can be transferred in-kind only with the consent of the counterparty to the extent the Fund does not intend to seek such consents.

<sup>4</sup> The Fund may only use sampling for this purpose if the sample: (i) is designed to generate performance that is highly correlated to the performance of the Fund’s portfolio; and (ii) consists entirely of instruments that are already included in the Fund’s portfolio.

Process (defined below) or DTC Process; or (ii) in the case that the Fund holds foreign instruments, such instruments are not eligible for trading due to local trading restrictions, local restrictions on securities transfers or other similar circumstances; or

- if the Fund permits an Authorized Participant to deposit or receive (as applicable) cash in lieu of some or all of the Deposit Instruments or Redemption Instruments, respectively, solely because: (i) such instruments are, in the case of the purchase of a Creation Unit, not available in sufficient quantity; (ii) such instruments are not eligible for trading by an Authorized Participant or the investor on whose behalf the Authorized Participant is acting; or (iii) to the extent that the Fund holds foreign instruments, the Fund shareholder would be subject to unfavorable income tax treatment if the Fund shareholder receives redemption proceeds in kind.

## **CUSTOM TRANSACTIONS**

Under certain circumstances, the Fund may utilize custom Creation Baskets, including (i) all cash baskets; (ii) baskets that substitute cash in lieu of certain securities that would otherwise be included in the Fund's Creation Basket; (iii) a basket that is different from the initial basket used in transactions on the same Business Day; or (iv) a non-representative basket that consists of a selection of instruments that are already included in the Fund's portfolio holdings (each, a "Custom Order"). Custom Orders typically clear outside the Continuous Net Settlement System of the NSCC (the "Clearing Process") and, therefore, like other orders outside the Clearing Process, may need to be transmitted early on the relevant Business Day to be effectuated at that day's NAV. Custom Orders may be required to be received by the Distributor by 3:00 p.m. Eastern time to be effectuated based on the Fund's NAV on that Business Day. A Custom Order may be placed when, for example, an Authorized Participant cannot transact in a security in the in-kind Creation Basket and therefore has additional cash included in a Creation Basket in lieu of such security.

Persons placing or effectuating custom orders should be mindful of time deadlines imposed by intermediaries, which may impact the successful processing of such orders.

Shares of the Fund will only be issued against full payment, as further described in the Prospectus and this SAI.

## **PROCEDURES FOR PURCHASE OF CREATION UNITS**

All orders to purchase Creation Units must be placed with the Distributor by or through an Authorized Participant. An Authorized Participant is a broker-dealer or other participant in the clearing process through the Clearing Process or a DTC Participant and in each case, must have an executed agreement with the Distributor with respect to the creations and redemption of the Fund's Creation Units ("Participant Agreement"). The Participant Agreement must also be accepted by the Transfer Agent.

An investor does not have to be an Authorized Participant but must place an order to purchase or redeem Creation Units through an Authorized Participant. All shares of the Fund purchased through the creation process will be entered on the records of DTC in the name of Cede & Co. for the account of the applicable DTC Participant.

There may be a limited number of Authorized Participants at any one point in time and only certain of these entities may be eligible to purchase and transmit non-U.S. instruments comprising a Creation Basket. To the extent that your financial institution is not an Authorized Participant, you may have to purchase Creation Units directly through an Authorized Participant or indirectly through your financial institution. If you opt to purchase Creation Units indirectly through your financial institution, you may incur additional transaction fees.

An order to purchase Creation Units of the Fund must be transmitted to the Distributor on a Business Day and received in proper form no later than the NAV Calculation Time (no later than 3:00 p.m., Eastern Time, for Custom Orders if required by the Distributor) in order for the purchase order to be processed at the NAV of the Fund's shares calculated on the date of transmittal ("Transmittal Date"). An order to purchase the Fund's Creation Units is considered to be in "proper form" if all procedures set forth in the Participant Agreement are properly followed. On Business Days that the Exchange closes early, the Fund may require an order for the purchase of Creation Units to be submitted earlier during the day. An Authorized Participant must deliver a Custom Order to the Distributor sufficiently in advance of the NAV Calculation Time in order to help ensure that the order is effected at the NAV calculated on that date.

Orders must be transmitted by the Authorized Participant to the Distributor by telephone or other transmission method acceptable to the Distributor pursuant to the procedures set forth in the applicable Participant Agreement. All orders to purchase Creation Units must be submitted consistent with the processing requirements set forth in the applicable Participant Agreement (see “Placement of Creation Orders Outside the Clearing Process” and “Placement of Creation Orders Using the Clearing Process,” below).

An investor must place orders to purchase the Fund’s Creation Units in the form required by the Authorized Participant. An Authorized Participant may require an investor to make certain representations or enter into agreements with respect to the placement of an order to purchase the Fund’s shares (e.g., to provide for payments of cash, when required).

Severe economic or market disruptions or changes, or telephone or other communication failure may impede the ability to reach the Distributor or an Authorized Participant. If an investor is submitting an order to purchase Creation Units through an Authorized Participant, the investor should ensure that an appropriate amount of time is provided for submission of such order by the Authorized Participant to the Distributor prior to the NAV Calculation Time.

All questions as to the composition of Deposit Instruments and the amount of any cash to be delivered, as applicable, and the validity, form, and eligibility (including time of receipt) for the deposit of any tendered securities or cash, as applicable, will be determined by the Trust, whose determination shall be final and binding. The Authorized Participant shall be solely responsible for any loss, liability, cost, and expense (including reasonable attorneys’ fees) incurred by the Fund or the Distributor related to the cancellation of an order to purchase or redeem Creation Units.

### **Placement of Purchase Orders Outside the Clearing Process**

To settle a purchase order outside the Clearing Process, the Authorized Participant must instruct the transfer of the relevant Deposit Instruments and/or any applicable cash in a timely fashion so as to ensure the timely delivery of the Deposit Instruments and/or any cash on the Settlement Date. The “Settlement Date” for the Fund is generally the second Business Day after an order to purchase or redeem shares is received by the Distributor.

A purchase order shall be deemed received on the Transmittal Date if the order is received by the Distributor in proper form no later than the NAV Calculation Time on the Transmittal Date (no later than 3:00 p.m., Eastern Time, for Custom Orders if required by the Distributor). Purchase orders received on time on the Transmittal Date will be processed at the NAV calculated on the Transmittal Date.

The delivery of any Deposit Instruments must be made by 12:00 p.m., Eastern Time, on the Settlement Date. Any cash, including the applicable transaction fee (see “Transaction Fees on Purchases of Creation Units,” below), shall be payable by 2:00 p.m., Eastern Time, on the Settlement Date. If the Custodian does not receive the Deposit Instruments and/or the applicable cash by the designated times on the Settlement Date, the purchase order may be cancelled. A canceled order may be resubmitted the following Business Day based on the Creation Basket and estimated Cash Amount for that Business Day. The delivery of Creation Units will take place no later than the settlement Date.

Generally, an Authorized Participant shall deliver cash and any Deposit Instruments that are U.S. government or U.S. government agency securities to the Fund through the Federal Reserve System. An Authorized Participant may deliver Deposit Instruments that are DTC eligible domestic equity or fixed income securities through the DTC manual clearing process (“DTC Process”). Shares of the Fund shall settle and clear through the DTC Process. The DTC Process involves the manual line-by-line transfer of multiple securities. Because the DTC Process involves the movement of multiple securities while the Clearing Process (see below) involves the movement of one unitary basket that automatically processes the movement of numerous securities, the DTC will charge the Fund more than the NSCC to settle a purchase of Creation Units.

Foreign securities cannot currently be processed through either the Clearing Process or the DTC Process. With respect to foreign Deposit Instruments, once a purchase order for Creation Units has been placed with the Distributor, the Distributor will inform the Advisor and the Custodian. The Custodian will then inform the appropriate sub-custodians, as applicable. The Authorized Participant must then timely deliver the relevant Deposit Instruments and/or any cash, including the transaction fee, to the Fund’s account maintained with the relevant local custodian(s) by the Settlement Date. If applicable, the sub-custodians will confirm to the Custodian that the Deposit Instruments and/or any applicable cash have been delivered, and the Custodian will notify the Advisor of the same.

After the Distributor has received a purchase order and the Custodian has received delivery of the Deposit Instruments and/or any applicable cash, including the transaction fee, delivery of the appropriate number of Fund shares will be made to the book-entry account designated by the Authorized Participant. Except as provided herein, a Creation Unit of the Fund will not be issued until the transfer of good title to the Trust of any Deposit Instruments has been completed and/or the applicable cash has been received.

### **Placement of Purchase Orders Using the Clearing Process**

Authorized Participants that are CNS Participants will be able to use the Clearing Process to purchase the Fund's Creation Units when Deposit Instruments are limited to DTC eligible domestic equity and fixed income securities and a Cash Amount or an all-cash payment. Under certain circumstances, a CNS Participant that tenders a Custom Order to purchase the Fund's Creation Units will be required to process the order outside the Clearing Process because the Clearing Process can only handle non-conforming deposits in specified situations. Additionally, Creation Units created in advance of receipt by the Custodian of all or a portion of the Deposit Instruments must be processed outside the Clearing Process (see "Additional Purchase Procedures," below).

The Clearing System has been specifically enhanced to effect purchases and redemptions of ETF securities such as the Fund's shares. The Clearing Process simplifies the settlement and delivery process by transferring a basket of securities between two parties and treating all of the securities that comprise the basket as a single position. By contrast, the DTC Process, which is available to all Authorized Participants, involves a manual line-by-line movement of each security position. To the extent that the Clearing Process is available for use, the Participant Agreement will authorize the Distributor to transmit through the Custodian to the NSCC, on behalf of the CNS Participant, applicable trade instructions as are necessary to effect a purchase order for the Fund's Creation Units. Pursuant to the trade instruction, the Authorized Participant agrees to deliver the Deposit Instruments and any/or any cash (including the transaction fee) to the Fund, together with such additional information as may be required by the Distributor.

An order to purchase Creation Units through the Clearing Process is deemed received on the Transmittal Date if such order is received by the Distributor in proper form no later than the NAV Calculation Time on the Transmittal Date (no later than 3:00 p.m., Eastern Time, for Custom Orders if required by the Distributor); and these Creation Units will be priced at Transmittal Date NAV. The delivery of any Deposit Instruments must be made by 12:00 p.m., Eastern Time, on the Settlement Date. Any cash, including the applicable transaction fee (see "Transaction Fees on Purchases of Creation Units," below), shall be payable by 2:00 p.m., Eastern Time, on the Settlement Date. If the Custodian does not receive the Deposit Instruments and/or the applicable cash by the designated times on the Settlement Date, the purchase order may be cancelled. A canceled order may be resubmitted the following Business Day based on the Creation Basket and estimated Cash Amount for that Business Day. The delivery of Creation Units will take place no later than the Settlement Date.

After the Distributor has received a purchase order and the Custodian has received delivery of the Deposit Instruments and/or any applicable cash, including the transaction fee, delivery of the appropriate number of Fund shares will be made to the book-entry account designated by the Authorized Participant. Except as provided herein, a Creation Unit of the Fund will not be issued until the transfer of good title to the Trust of any Deposit Instruments has been completed and/or the applicable cash has been received.

### **Rejection of Purchase Orders**

The Distributor may reject a purchase order for Creation Units if the order is not submitted in proper form consistent with the requirements set forth in the Participant Agreement.

The SEC has expressed the view that a suspension of creations that impairs the arbitrage mechanism applicable to the trading of ETF shares in the secondary market is inconsistent with Rule 6c-11 under the 1940 Act. The SEC's position does not prohibit the suspension or rejection of creations in all instances. The Trust reserves the right, to the extent consistent with the provisions of Rule 6c-11 under the 1940 Act and the SEC's position, to reject an order for Creation Units transmitted to it by the Distributor in respect to the Fund, including instances in which: (1) the order is not in proper form; (2) the securities delivered do not conform with the Deposit Instruments for the relevant date; (3) an investor, upon obtaining the shares ordered, would own 80% or more of the currently outstanding shares of the Fund; (4) the acceptance of the Deposit Instruments and/or any applicable cash would, in the opinion of counsel to the Trust, be unlawful; (5) the acceptance or receipt of the order for a Creation Unit would, in the opinion of counsel to the Trust, be unlawful; or (6) in the event that circumstances outside the

control of the Fund, the Custodian, the Transfer Agent, and/or the Advisor make it for all practical purposes not feasible to process creation orders.

Examples of such circumstances include natural disasters or public service or utility problems such as fires, floods, extreme weather conditions, and power outages resulting in telephone, telecopy, and computer failures; market conditions or activities causing trading halts; systems failures involving computer or other information systems affecting the Trust, the Distributor, the Custodian, the Transfer Agent, the DTC, the NSCC, the Federal Reserve System, or any other participant in the creation process, and other extraordinary events. The Distributor shall notify an Authorized Participant of the rejection of any order. The Trust, the Transfer Agent, the Custodian, and the Distributor are under no duty, however, to give notification of any defects or irregularities in the delivery of Deposit Instruments and/or any cash nor shall either of them incur any liability for the failure to give any such notification. The Trust, the Transfer Agent, the Custodian, and the Distributor shall not be liable for the rejection of any purchase order for Creation Units.

### **Additional Purchase Procedures**

Creation Units may be issued to an Authorized Participant in advance of receipt by the Trust of all or a portion of the applicable Deposit Instruments provided that the Authorized Participant deposits an initial deposit of cash with the Trust having a value greater than the NAV of the requisite Fund shares on the date the order is received. In addition to available Deposit Instruments, cash must be deposited in an amount equal to the sum of the Cash Amount plus 115% of the market value of the Deposit Instruments not delivered ("Additional Cash Deposit").

An order will be deemed received on the Transmittal Date if: (1) the order is received by the Distributor in proper form no later than the NAV Calculation Time on that date (no later than 3:00 p.m., Eastern Time if required by the Distributor); and (2) federal funds equal to the sum of the Cash Amount, the Additional Cash Deposit, and the applicable transaction fee are received by the Custodian by 12:00 p.m., Eastern Time, on the Business Day following the Transmittal Date.

Pending delivery of the undelivered Deposit Instruments, the Authorized Participant shall be required to deposit additional cash, as needed, to maintain the Additional Cash Deposit at an amount equal to 115% of the value of undelivered Deposit Instruments, which shall be marked to market daily by the Fund until the outstanding securities are received. Under these circumstances, the shares of the Fund shall be delivered no later than the Settlement Date.

If an order is not received in proper form by the NAV Calculation Time on the Transmittal Date (no later than 3:00 p.m., Eastern Time, if required by the Distributor) or the required cash deposit is not timely received on the Settlement Date by the Custodian, then the order may be cancelled or deemed not received and the Authorized Participant effecting the transaction will be liable to the Fund for any losses resulting therefrom.

To the extent that the undelivered Deposit Instruments are not received by 12:00 p.m., Eastern Time, on the Settlement Date, the Fund may utilize the Additional Cash Deposit to buy the missing Deposit Instruments at any time and the Authorized Participant effecting the transaction will be liable to the Fund for the costs incurred by the Fund in connection with such purchases and any shortfall between the cost to the Fund of purchasing such securities and the value of the Additional Cash Deposit. Costs to purchase the outstanding Deposit Instruments shall include, but not be limited to, any applicable transaction fee imposed by the Fund in connection with the purchase of the undelivered Deposit Instruments, the amount by which the actual purchase price of the undelivered Deposit Instruments exceeds the Additional Cash Deposit or the market value of such Deposit Instruments on the day the purchase order was received by the Distributor plus the brokerage and related transaction costs associated with such purchases. The Fund will return the remaining Additional Cash Deposit once the undelivered Deposit Instruments are received by the Custodian or purchased by and deposited into the Fund.

The Participant Agreement may contain further information relating to this collateral process.

### **Transaction Fees on Purchases of Creation Units**

The Fund charges a transaction fee, which is intended to cover the transfer and other transactional costs it incurs to issue Creation Units. A per transaction fee charge will be charged by each Fund ("Standard Charge"), regardless of the number of Creation Units purchased. The Fund reserves the right to charge additional transactions fees of up to three (3) times the Standard Charge for: (1) purchase orders processed outside the Clearing Process; (2) purchase orders involve cash in lieu amounts; and (3) cash purchases ("Additional Charges"). The Fund also reserves the right to adjust the Standard Charge and/or

the Additional Charges at any time in order to ensure that the Fund is able to continue to recoup the costs it actually incurs to issue Creation Units. Authorized Participants are responsible for paying the costs to transfer Deposit Instruments to the Fund. Authorized Participants may also charge investors a fee to purchase Creation Units on their behalf.

The Standard Charge and maximum transaction fee for each Fund are \$250 and \$1,000, respectively. An investor purchasing Creation Units outside the Clearing Process may be required to pay higher transaction fees than if the purchase is processed through the Clearing Process.

### **Risks of Purchasing Creation Units**

The proposed method by which the Fund's Creation Units will be purchased and traded may raise certain issues under applicable securities laws. Because new Creation Units of the Fund's shares may be issued and sold on an ongoing basis, a "distribution" of that Fund's shares may be occurring at any time. Certain activities that a shareholder performs as a dealer may, depending on the circumstances, result in their being deemed participants in a distribution in a manner which could render them statutory underwriters and subject them to the prospectus delivery and liability provisions of the 1933 Act.

For example, a shareholder could be deemed a statutory underwriter if it takes Creation Units from the Fund, breaks them down into the constituent shares and sells the shares directly to customers. A shareholder may also be deemed to be a statutory underwriter if the shareholder chooses to couple the purchase of a supply of new shares of the Fund with an active selling effort involving solicitation of secondary market demand for the shares.

Whether a person is an underwriter depends on all the facts and circumstances pertaining to that person's activities and the examples set forth here are not intended to depict all circumstances under which a shareholder may be deemed to be a statutory underwriter.

Dealers who are not "underwriters" but are participating in a distribution (as opposed to ordinary secondary market transactions), and thus dealing with the Fund's shares as part of an "unsold allotment" within the meaning of Section 4(3)(C) of the 1933 Act, will be unable to rely on the prospectus-delivery exemption provided by Section 4(3) of the 1933 Act.

Pursuant to Rule 153 under the 1933 Act, a prospectus delivery obligation under Section 5(b)(2) of the 1933 Act owed to a member of the Exchange in connection with a sale on the Exchange is satisfied by the fact that a Prospectus is available at the Exchange upon request. This prospectus delivery mechanism is only available with respect to transactions on the Exchange.

### **REDEMPTION OF CREATION UNITS**

Redemption requests must be placed by or through an Authorized Participant. Shares of the Fund may only be redeemed in Creation Units except upon liquidation of the Fund. To redeem shares with the Fund, an investor must accumulate enough shares of that Fund to constitute one or more Creation Units. An investor may accumulate the shares necessary to comprise a Creation Unit of the Fund on the Exchange. However, there is no assurance that there will be sufficient liquidity in the market to enable the purchase of a sufficient number of shares the Fund to complete a Creation Unit. An investor should expect to incur brokerage commissions and other costs to purchase the required number of shares to complete a Creation Unit.

Creation Units of the Fund may be redeemed on any Business Day at their NAV next calculated after a redemption request in proper form is received by the Distributor. A redemption request is considered to be in "proper form" if all procedures set forth in the Participant Agreement are properly followed.

The redemption of the Fund's Creation Units will be subject to compliance with applicable federal and state securities laws. An Authorized Participant that is not a "qualified institutional buyer" or "QIB" as such term is defined in Rule 144A of the 1933 Act will not be able to receive Redemption Instruments that are restricted securities eligible for resale under Rule 144A. An Authorized Participant may be required by the Fund to provide a written confirmation with respect to QIB status in order to receive Redemption Instruments. An Authorized Participant may request a redeeming investor on whose behalf it is acting to enter into agreements outlining the terms under which cash must be substituted for one or more Redemption Instruments in order to comply with applicable securities laws and other legal restrictions relevant to the investor.

All orders to redeem Creation Units of the Fund must be received by the Distributor in proper form no later than the NAV Calculation on a Business Day (no later than 3:00 p.m., Eastern Time, for orders involving cash in lieu requests by Authorized

Participants if required by the Distributor) in order to receive the NAV calculated on that date ("Transmittal Date"). On Business Days that the Exchange closes early, the Fund may require orders for the redemption of a Creation Unit(s) to be submitted earlier during the day. An Authorized Participant must deliver a Custom Order to the Distributor sufficiently in advance of the NAV Calculation Time in order to help ensure that the order is effected at the NAV calculated on the Transmittal Date.

An investor redeeming the Fund's Creation Units should submit the redemption order in the form required by the Authorized Participant selected to process the transaction. An investor intending to redeem the Fund's Creation Units should allow sufficient time to permit a timely submission of the redemption request to the Distributor and transfer of the Creation Units to the Fund.

There may be a limited number of Authorized Participants at any one point in time and only certain of these entities may be eligible to receive foreign securities on your behalf as part of the in-kind redemption process. To the extent that your financial institution is not an Authorized Participant, you may redeem Creation Units directly through an Authorized Participant or indirectly through your financial institution. If you opt to redeem Creation Units indirectly through your financial institution, you may incur additional transaction fees. You should also allow additional time to effect redemptions through your financial intermediary if the financial intermediary is not an Authorized Participant.

Although the Settlement Date for the redemption of Fund shares is generally the second Business Day after an order to redeem shares is received by the Distributor, the Settlement Date may be up to seven days after the Transmittal Date.

### **Placement of Redemption Orders Outside the Clearing Process**

An order to redeem Creation Units is deemed received by the Distributor on the Transmittal Date if: (1) the order is received by the Distributor in proper form no later than the NAV Calculation Time (no later than 3:00 p.m., Eastern Time, for orders involving cash in lieu requests by Authorized Participants if required by the Distributor) on the Transmittal Date; (2) the order is accompanied or followed by the delivery of the requisite Creation Units, which delivery must be made through the DTC to the Custodian no later than 12:00 p.m., Eastern Time, on the Settlement Date; and (3) the order is accompanied or followed by the delivery of any Cash Amount and the applicable transaction fee to the Custodian through the Federal Reserve System no later than 2:00 p.m., Eastern Time, on the Settlement Date.

After a redemption request is received by the Distributor, the Custodian shall initiate procedures for the transfer of the Redemption Instruments and any Cash Amount, less any transaction fee, which is expected to be delivered by the Settlement Date.

The value of the Redemption Instruments and any Cash Amount will be calculated in accordance with the Trust's procedures for calculation of the Fund's NAV as summarized in the Prospectus and this SAI. Therefore, if a redemption in proper form is submitted to the Distributor by an Authorized Participant no later than the NAV Calculation Time on the Transmittal Date (no later than 3:00 p.m., Eastern Time, for orders involving cash in lieu requests from Authorized Participants if required by the Distributor), and the requisite number of Fund shares are timely delivered to the Custodian no later than 12:00 P.M. on the Settlement Date, then the value of the Redemption Instruments and any Cash Amount will be determined by the Fund Accountant as of the Transmittal Date. If a redemption order is submitted to the Distributor on the Transmittal Date not later than the NAV Calculation Time on the Transmittal Date (no later than 3:00 p.m., Eastern Time, for Custom Orders if required by the Distributor) but either: (1) the requisite number of shares of Fund shares are not timely delivered or (2) the redemption order is not submitted in proper form, then the redemption order will not be deemed received as of the Transmittal Date. In such case, the value of the Redemption Instruments and any Cash Amount will be computed as of the Business Day that an order in proper form is received by the Distributor.

### **Placement of Redemption Orders Using the Clearing Process**

Shareholders redeeming Creation Units pursuant to Custom Orders may be required to settle their redemptions outside of the Clearing Process. Redemptions of Creation Units in advance of receipt by the Custodian of all Fund shares (see "Additional Redemption Procedures," below) must be processed outside of the Clearing Process.

An order to redeem Creation Units using the Clearing Process is deemed received on the Transmittal Date if such order is received by the Distributor in proper form no later than the NAV Calculation Time on such Transmittal Date. An order deemed

received after the NAV Calculation Time on the Transmittal date (after 3:00 p.m., Eastern Time, for orders involving cash in lieu requests from Authorized Participants if required by the Distributor) will be effected at the NAV calculated on the next Business Day. The Redemption Instruments and any Cash Amount, less the transaction fee, will be transmitted by the Settlement Date.

If a redemption order is submitted to the Distributor not later than the NAV Calculation Time on the Transmittal Date (no later than 3:00 p.m., Eastern Time, for Custom Orders if required by the Distributor) but either: (1) the requisite number of shares of Fund shares are not timely delivered or (2) the redemption order is not submitted in proper form, then the redemption order will not be deemed received as of the Transmittal Date. In such a case, the value of the Redemption Instruments and any Cash Amount will be computed as of the Business Day that an order in proper form is received by the Distributor.

### **Additional Redemption Procedures**

Creations Units may be redeemed in advance of receipt by the Trust of all or a portion of Fund shares provided that the Authorized Participant deposits an initial deposit of cash with the Trust in an amount equal to the sum of any Cash Amount plus 115% of the market value of the missing Fund shares not delivered ("Redemption Deposit").

An order will be deemed received on the Transmittal Date if: (1) the Distributor received the order in proper form no later than the NAV Calculation Time on that date (no later than 3:00 p.m., Eastern Time, if required by the Distributor); and (2) the federal funds equal to the sum of any Cash Amount, the Redemption Deposit, and the applicable transaction fee are received by the Custodian by 12:00 p.m., Eastern Time, on the Business Day following the Transmittal Date. Pending delivery of the undelivered Fund shares, the Authorized Participant shall be required to deposit additional cash, as needed, to maintain the Redemption Deposit at an amount equal to 115% of the value of undelivered Fund shares, which shall be marked to market daily by the Fund until the outstanding shares are delivered. Under these circumstances, the Redemption Instruments, and any Cash Amount, less the applicable transaction fee, shall be delivered no later than the Settlement Date.

If an order is not received in proper form by the NAV Calculation Time on the Transmittal Date (no later than 3:00 p.m., Eastern Time, if required by the Distributor) or the required cash deposit is not timely received on the next Business Day following the date the order was received by the Distributor, then the order may be cancelled and deemed not received and the Authorized Participant affecting the transaction will be liable to the Fund for any losses resulting therefrom.

To the extent that the undelivered Fund shares are not received by 12:00 p.m., Eastern Time, the Fund may use the Redemption Deposit to purchase the undelivered shares at any time and the Authorized Participant shall be liable to the Fund for the costs incurred by the Fund in connection with such purchases and any shortfall between the cost to the Fund to acquire the shares and the value of the Redemption Deposit. Costs to purchase the outstanding Fund shares shall include, but not be limited to, the amount by which the actual purchase price of the undelivered Fund shares exceeds the Redemption Deposit or the market value of such shares on the day the purchase order was received by the Distributor plus the brokerage and related transaction costs associated with such purchases. The Fund will return the remaining Redemption Deposit once the undelivered shares are received by the Custodian.

The Participant Agreement may contain further information relating to this collateral process.

### **Transaction Fees on Redemptions of Creation Units**

The Fund charges a transaction fee, which is intended to cover the transfer and other transactional costs it incurs to redeem Creation Units. A transaction fee will be charged by each Fund to Authorized Participants per redemption ("Standard Redemption Fee"). The Fund reserves the right to charge additional transactions fees not to exceed three (3) times the Standard Redemption Fee for: (1) orders processed outside of the Clearing Process; (2) orders involving cash in lieu amounts; and (3) cash redemptions ("Additional Redemption Charges"). The Fund also reserves the right to adjust the Standard Charge and/or the Additional Redemption Charges at any time in order to ensure that the Fund is able to continue to recoup the costs it actually incurs to issue Creation Units. Authorized Participants are responsible for paying the costs to transfer the Redemption Instruments from the Fund. Authorized Participants may charge investors a fee to redeem Creation Units on their behalf.

The standard transaction fee and maximum transaction fee for the Fund are \$250 and \$1,000, respectively.



## **Suspension of Redemption Rights**

The right of redemption may be suspended with respect to the Fund for: (1) any period during which the Exchange is closed (other than customary weekend and holidays); (2) any period during which trading on the Exchange is suspended or restricted; (3) any period which an emergency exists as a result of which disposal of Fund shares or determination of the Fund's NAV is not reasonably practicable; or (4) such other periods as the SEC may permit.

## **BROKERAGE TRANSACTIONS**

While changes to the Fund's investment portfolio will generally be implemented through the issuance and redemption of the Fund's Creation Units in exchange for a Creation Basket, there may be occasions wherein the Advisor will purchase or sell securities directly on behalf of the Fund. To the extent that the Fund issues or redeems Creation Units partly or solely for cash, the Advisor may have to execute portfolio transactions on behalf of the Fund. The Fund paid \$700,667, \$448,718, and \$264,001 in brokerage commissions for the three fiscal years ended April 30, 2022, April 30, 2023, and April 30, 2024, respectively.

## **TRADE ALLOCATION**

Investment decisions for the Fund and other clients of the Advisor are made with a view to achieving their respective investment objectives and after consideration of such factors as their current holdings, availability of cash for investment, and the size of their investments generally.

A security may be bought or sold by the Advisor for only one client or in different amounts and at different times for more than one but less than all clients. Likewise, a particular security may be bought for one or more clients when one or more other clients are selling the security. In addition, purchases or sales of the same security may be made for two or more clients of the Advisor on the same day. To the extent that multiple clients are purchasing or selling a specific security at the same time, such transactions will be allocated among the clients in a manner believed by the Advisor to be equitable to each. In some cases, this procedure could have an adverse effect on the price or amount of the securities purchased or sold by the Fund. Purchase and sale orders for the Fund may be combined with those of other clients of the Advisor in the interest of achieving the most favorable net results for the Fund.

## **BROKERAGE ALLOCATION**

The Advisor may place orders for the purchase and sale of portfolio securities for the Fund through numerous brokers and dealers. In so doing, it uses its best efforts to obtain for the Fund the best price and execution available. In seeking the best price and execution, the Advisor, having in mind the Fund's best interests, considers all factors it deems relevant, including, by way of illustration, price, the size of the transaction, the nature of the market for the security, the amount of the commission, the timing of the transaction taking into account market prices and trends, the reputation, experience, and financial stability of the broker-dealer involved, and the quality of service rendered by the broker-dealer in other transactions.

Transactions on U.S. stock exchanges and other agency transactions involve the payment by the Fund of negotiated brokerage commissions. Such commissions vary among brokers. Also, a particular broker may charge different commissions according to such factors as the difficulty and size of the transaction. Transactions in foreign securities often involve the payment of fixed brokerage commissions, which are generally higher than those in the U.S. There is generally no stated commission in the case of securities traded in the over-the-counter markets, but the price paid by the Fund usually includes an undisclosed dealer commission or mark-up. Purchases and sales of fixed income securities (for instance, money market instruments and bonds, notes, and bills) usually are principal transactions. In a principal transaction, the party from whom the Fund purchases, or to whom the Fund sells, is acting on its own behalf (and not as the agent of some other party such as its customers). These securities normally are purchased directly from the issuer or from an underwriter or market maker for the securities. The prices of securities purchased from dealers serving as market makers reflect the spread between the bid and asked price. In underwritten offerings, the price paid by the Fund includes a disclosed, fixed commission or discount retained by the underwriter or dealer.

## **SOFT DOLLAR PRACTICES**

It has for many years been a common practice in the investment advisory business for advisors of investment companies and other institutional investors to receive research, statistical, and quotation services from broker-dealers that execute portfolio transactions for their clients. Consistent with this practice, the Advisor may receive research, statistical, and quotation services from broker-dealers with which it places the Fund's portfolio transactions. These services, which in some cases may also be purchased for cash, include general economic and security market reviews, industry and company reviews, evaluations of securities, and recommendations as to the purchase and sale of securities. Some of these services are of value to the Advisor and its affiliates in advising various of its clients (including the Fund), although not all of these services are necessarily useful and of value in managing the Fund. The investment advisory fee paid by the Fund to the Advisor is not reduced because the Advisor and its affiliates receive such services.

As permitted by Section 28(e) of the 1934 Act and by the Trust's Management Agreement with the Advisor, the Advisor may cause the Fund to pay a broker-dealer that provides the brokerage and research services described above an amount of disclosed commission for effecting a securities transaction for the Fund in excess of the commission which another broker-dealer may charge for effecting that transaction. The Advisor's authority to cause the Fund to pay any such greater commissions is also subject to such policies as the Trustees may adopt from time to time.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE TRUST**

### **SHAREHOLDER RIGHTS**

All shareholders are entitled to one vote for a Fund share held on the record date for any action requiring a vote by the shareholders. Shareholders of the Trust will vote in the aggregate and not by series except as otherwise expressly required by law or when the Trustees determine that the matter to be voted upon affects only the interests of the shareholders of a particular series of the Trust.

Each share of the Fund represents a pro rata interest in the assets of the Fund. Fund shares have no preemptive, exchange, subscription or conversion rights and there are no restrictions on the transfer of Fund shares. The Fund share participates pro rata in all dividends and distributions of the Fund and in the net distributable assets upon liquidation.

The Trust is not required to hold annual meetings of shareholders for the purpose of electing Trustees except that (1) the Trust is required to hold a shareholder meeting for the election of Trustees at such time as less than a majority of the Trustees holding office have been elected by shareholders and (2) if, as a result of a vacancy on the Board, less than two-thirds of the Trustees holding office have been elected by the shareholders, that vacancy may only be filled by a vote of the shareholders. Except as set forth above, a Trustee may continue to hold office and may appoint successor Trustees.

The Declaration of Trust provides a process for the bringing of derivative actions by shareholders for claims beyond the process otherwise required by law. This derivative actions process is intended to permit legitimate inquiries and claims while avoiding the time, expense, distraction, and other harm that can be caused to the Fund or its shareholders as a result of spurious shareholder demands and derivative actions. Prior to bringing a derivative action, a pre-suit demand by the complaining shareholder must first be made on the Board of Trustees, unless such action is excused because a majority of the members of the Board have a material personal financial interest in the action at issue. Following receipt of the demand, the Trustees must be afforded a reasonable amount of time to investigate and consider the demand.

Under the Declaration of Trust, the Trustees have the power to liquidate any series of the Trust without shareholder approval. While the Trustees have no present intent to exercise this power, they may do so if a series fails to reach a viable size within a reasonable amount of time or for such other reasons as may be determined by the Board.

The rights of shareholders cannot be modified without a majority vote of the Shareholders.

## FEES PAID BY THE FUND FOR SERVICES

	Fiscal Year Ended April 30, 2022	Fiscal Year Ended April 30, 2023	Fiscal Year Ended April 30, 2024
Advisory Fee Paid	\$7,122,308	\$7,401,121	\$5,647,452
Advisory Fee Waived/Reimbursed	—	—	—
Waivers/Expense Reimbursements	—	—	—
Recaptured Administration Fee	\$412,240	\$439,712	\$372,316
Paid to Citi Management and Legal Administration	\$333,747	\$341,773	\$281,660
Fee Paid to MFund Fund Accounting Fee	\$402	\$333	\$474
Paid to Citi Compliance Services	\$37,795	\$39,174	\$33,098
Fees Paid to MFund			

## PRINCIPAL HOLDERS OF SECURITIES

From time to time, certain shareholders, including Authorized Participants, may own, of record, beneficially, or both, more than 25% of the Fund's shares and those shareholders may be able to control the outcome of a shareholder vote.

As of August 1, 2024, the Trustees and officers of the Trust in the aggregate owned less than 1% of the outstanding shares of beneficial interest of the Fund.

Although the Trust does not have information concerning the beneficial ownership of shares held in the names of the Depository Trust Company (DTC) participants, as of August 1, 2024, the name, address and percentage ownership of each DTC participant that owned of record 5% or more of the outstanding shares of the Fund were as follows:

Shareholder Name	Percentage Owned
Cede & Co. 55 Water Street, 25 <sup>th</sup> Floor New York, NY, 10041	100%

## BOOK ENTRY ONLY SYSTEM

The information below supplements disclosure in the Prospectus regarding the book entry system. This information should be read in conjunction with the disclosure included in the Prospectus.

DTC acts as securities depository for the Fund's shares. Shares of the Fund are represented by securities registered in the name of DTC or its nominee, Cede & Co., and deposited with, or on behalf of, DTC. Generally, certificates will not be issued for shares.

DTC is a limited-purpose trust company that was created to hold securities of the DTC Participants and to facilitate the clearance and settlement of securities transactions among the DTC Participants in such securities through electronic book-entry changes in accounts of the DTC Participants, thereby eliminating the need for physical movement of securities certificates. DTC Participants include securities brokers and dealers, banks, trust companies, clearing corporations and certain other organizations, some of whom (and/or their representatives) own DTC. More specifically, DTC is owned by a number of its DTC Participants and by the Exchange and FINRA. Access to the DTC system is also available to others such as banks, brokers, dealers, and trust companies that clear through or maintain a custodial relationship with a DTC Participant, either directly or indirectly (the "Indirect Participants").

Beneficial ownership of the Fund's shares is limited to DTC Participants, Indirect Participants, and persons holding interests through DTC Participants and Indirect Participants. Ownership of beneficial interests in the Fund's shares (owners of such beneficial interests are referred to herein as "Beneficial Owners") is shown on, and the transfer of ownership is effected only through, records maintained by DTC (with respect to DTC Participants) and on the records of DTC Participants (with respect to Indirect Participants and Beneficial Owners that are not DTC Participants). Beneficial Owners will receive from or through the DTC Participant a written confirmation relating to their purchase of the Fund's shares. The Trust recognizes DTC or its nominee as the record owner of the Fund's shares for all purposes. Beneficial Owners of the Fund's shares are not entitled to have Fund shares registered in their names and will not receive or be entitled to physical delivery of share certificates. Each Beneficial Owner must rely on the procedures of DTC and any DTC Participant and/or Indirect Participant through which such Beneficial Owner holds its interests, to exercise any rights of a holder of the Fund's shares.

Conveyance of all notices, statements, and other communications to Beneficial Owners is effected as follows. DTC will make available to the Trust upon request and for a fee a listing of the Fund's shares held by each DTC Participant. The Trust shall obtain from each such DTC Participant the number of Beneficial Owners holding the Fund's shares, directly or indirectly, through such DTC Participant. The Trust shall provide each such DTC Participant with copies of such notice, statement, or other communication, in such form, number and at such place as such DTC Participant may reasonably request, in order that such notice, statement or communication may be transmitted by such DTC Participant, directly or indirectly, to such Beneficial Owners.

In addition, the Trust shall pay to each such DTC Participant a fair and reasonable amount as reimbursement for the expenses attendant to such transmittal, all subject to applicable statutory and regulatory requirements.

Share distributions shall be made to DTC or its nominee, Cede & Co., as the registered holder of the Fund's shares. DTC or its nominee, upon receipt of any such distributions, shall credit immediately DTC Participants' accounts with payments in amounts proportionate to their respective beneficial interests in the Fund as shown on the records of DTC or its nominee. Payments by DTC Participants to Indirect Participants and Beneficial Owners of the Fund's shares held through such DTC Participants will be governed by standing instructions and customary practices, as is now the case with securities held for the accounts of customers in bearer form or registered in a "street name," and will be the responsibility of such DTC Participants.

The Trust has no responsibility or liability for any aspect of the records relating to or notices to Beneficial Owners, or payments made on account of beneficial ownership interests in the Fund's shares, or for maintaining, supervising, or reviewing any records relating to such beneficial ownership interests, or for any other aspect of the relationship between DTC and the DTC Participants or the relationship between such DTC Participants and the Indirect Participants and Beneficial Owners owning through such DTC Participants.

DTC may determine to discontinue providing its service with respect to the Fund at any time by giving reasonable notice to the Fund and discharging its responsibilities with respect thereto under applicable law. Under such circumstances, the Fund shall take action either to find a replacement for DTC to perform its functions at a comparable cost or, if such replacement is unavailable, to issue and deliver printed certificates representing ownership of the Fund's shares, unless the Trust makes other arrangements with respect thereto satisfactory to the Exchange. The DTC Participants' rules and policies are made publicly available through its website at [www.dtcc.com](http://www.dtcc.com).

## **VOTING PROXIES OF FUND PORTFOLIO SECURITIES**

The Board has delegated responsibilities for decisions regarding proxy voting for securities held by the Fund to the Advisor. The Advisor may further delegate such proxy voting to a sub-advisor or a third-party proxy voting service provider. The Advisor will vote such proxies in accordance with their proxy policies and procedures. In some instances, the Advisor may be asked to cast a proxy vote that presents a conflict between its interests and the interests of the Fund's shareholders. In such a case, the Trust's policy requires that the Advisor abstain from making a voting decision and to forward all necessary proxy voting materials to the Trust to enable the Board to make a voting decision. When the Board is required to make a proxy voting decision, only the Trustees without a conflict of interest with regard to the security in question or the matter to be voted upon shall be permitted to participate in the decision of how the Fund's vote will be cast. The Advisor has developed a detailed proxy voting policy that has been approved by the Board. A copy of the proxy voting policies and procedures are attached hereto as Appendix 2.

Information on how each Fund voted proxies for the most recent year ended June 30, relating to portfolio securities is available without charge, upon request, by calling (800) 253-0412 or on the SEC's Internet site at [www.sec.gov](http://www.sec.gov). In addition, a copy of the Fund's proxy voting policies and procedures is also available by calling (855) 4SS-ETFS or (855) 477-3837 and will be sent within three business days of receipt of a request.

## **PORTFOLIO HOLDINGS DISCLOSURE PRACTICES**

The Board has adopted policies and procedures for the public and nonpublic disclosure of the Fund's portfolio securities.

Each day the Fund is open for business, before the opening of regular trading on the Exchange, the Fund will publicly disclose on the Fund's website at [www.strategysharesefts.com](http://www.strategysharesefts.com) the Fund's full portfolio holdings that will form the basis of the next calculation of current NAV, which are based on the Fund's portfolio holdings as of the close of business on the prior Business Day. In addition, each Business Day, a portfolio composition file, which displays the names and quantities of the instruments comprising the Creation Basket(s), as well as the estimated Cash Amount (if any), for that day, is publicly disseminated prior to the opening of the Exchange via the NSCC.

In addition, as a general matter, no information concerning the portfolio holdings of the Fund may be disclosed to any unaffiliated third party except (1) to service providers that require such information in the course of performing their duties (for example, the Fund's custodian, administrator, the Advisor, any sub-advisor, independent public accountants, attorneys, officers and trustees) and are subject to a duty of confidentiality including a duty not to trade on non-public information, and (2) pursuant to certain exceptions that serve a legitimate business purpose. These exceptions may include: (1) disclosure of portfolio holdings only after such information has been publicly disclosed on the Fund's website, in marketing materials or through filings with the SEC as described below; and (2) to third-party vendors, that: (a) agree to not distribute the portfolio holdings or results of the analysis to third parties, other departments or persons who are likely to use the information for purposes of purchasing or selling the Fund before the portfolio holdings or results of the analysis become publicly available; and (b) sign a written confidentiality agreement. The confidentiality agreement must provide, but is not limited to, that the recipient of the portfolio holdings information agrees to limit access to the portfolio holdings information to its employees who, on a need to know basis are: (1) authorized to have access to the portfolio holdings information; and (2) subject to confidentiality obligations, including duties not to trade on non-public information, no less restrictive than the confidentiality obligations contained in the confidentiality agreement.

The Fund's portfolio holdings are currently disclosed to the public through filings with the SEC. The Fund discloses its portfolio holdings by mailing the annual and semi-annual reports to shareholders approximately two months after the end of the fiscal year and semi-annual period, respectively. In addition, the Fund's portfolio holdings are publicly available on the SEC's EDGAR website in the Fund's reports on Form N-CSR two months after the end of each semi-annual period and on Form N-PORT two months after each quarter.

Neither the Fund nor the Advisor may enter into any arrangement providing for the disclosure of non-public portfolio holding information for the receipt of compensation or benefit of any kind. Any exceptions to the policies and procedures may only be made by the consent of the Trust's chief compliance officer upon a determination that such disclosure serves a legitimate business purpose and is in the best interests of the Fund and will be reported to the Board at the Board's next regularly scheduled meeting.

## **CODE OF ETHICS**

The Trust, the Advisor and the Distributor have adopted codes of ethics under Rule 17j-1(c) of the 1940 Act. The purpose of each code is to avoid potential conflicts of interest and to prevent fraud, deception, or misconduct with respect to the Fund. Such codes of ethics permit personnel covered by the codes to invest in securities that may be purchased or held by the Fund, subject to the restrictions of the codes. The codes are filed as exhibits to the Trust's registration statement.

## **TRUST EXPENSES**

The Trust's service providers bear all expenses in connection with the performance of their respective services, except that the Fund will bear the following expenses relating to its operations: taxes, interest, brokerage fees and commissions, if any, fees and travel expenses of the Trustees, SEC fees and state fees and expenses, certain insurance premiums, outside and, to the extent authorized by the Trust, inside auditing and legal fees and expenses, fees charged by rating agencies in having the Fund's shares rated, advisory and administration fees, fees and reasonable out-of-pocket expenses of the Custodian, fund accountant, and Transfer Agent, expenses incurred for pricing securities owned by the Fund, costs of maintenance of corporate existence, typesetting and printing prospectuses for regulatory purposes and for distribution to current shareholders, costs and expenses of shareholders and Trustee reports and meetings, and any extraordinary expenses.

## **PORTFOLIO TURNOVER**

The portfolio turnover rate of the Fund is defined by the SEC as the ratio of the lesser of annual sales or purchases to the monthly average value of the portfolio, excluding from both the numerator and the denominator securities with maturities at the time of acquisition of one year or less. Portfolio turnover generally involves some expense to the Fund, including brokerage commissions or dealer mark-ups and other transactions costs on the sale of securities and reinvestment in other securities. For the fiscal years ended April 30, 2023, and April 30, 2024, the portfolio turnover rates for the Fund were 58%, and 53%, respectively.

## **DETERMINATION OF NET ASSET VALUE**

The Fund calculates its NAV per share as of the close of the Exchange (normally 4:00 p.m. Eastern Time) on each Business Day. The NAV per share is calculated by dividing the value of the net assets of the Fund (e.g., value of total assets less total liabilities) by the total number of shares outstanding.

To calculate the Fund's NAV per share, the Trust follows valuation procedures approved by the Board. Pursuant to these procedures, the Trust relies on certain security pricing services to provide current market values for the Fund's portfolio securities. These security pricing services value equity securities (including foreign equity securities) traded on a securities exchange at the last reported sales price on the principal exchange. Equity securities quoted by Nasdaq are valued at the Nasdaq Official Closing Price. If there is no reported sale on the principal exchange and in the case of over-the-counter securities, equity securities are valued at a bid price estimated by the security pricing service. Debt securities traded on a national securities exchange or in the over-the-counter market are valued at the last reported sales price on the principal exchange. If there is no reported sale on the principal exchange, and for all other debt securities, including zero-coupon securities, debt securities are valued at a bid price estimated by the security pricing service. Foreign securities quoted in foreign currencies are translated in U.S. dollars at the foreign exchange rate in effect as of the close of the Exchange (generally 4:00 p.m., Eastern Time) on the day the value of the foreign security is determined.

Options contracts are generally valued at the mean of the bid and asked price as reported on the highest-volume exchange (in terms of the number of option contracts traded for that issue) on which such options are traded. Short-term investments with remaining maturities of 60 days or less at the time of purchase may be valued at amortized cost. Investments in other open-end investment companies are valued at NAV (except ETFs, which are valued consistent with the pricing process for equity securities). In certain limited circumstances such as when a security's closing price versus the prior day's closing price exceeds a defined variance tolerance, or when a security's closing price is unchanged as compared to the prior day's closing price, a financial intermediary's good faith determination of the fair value of a security or option may be used instead of its current market value, even if the security's market price is readily available.

In cases where market prices for portfolio securities are not readily available, a Pricing Committee established and appointed by the Trustees determines in good faith, subject to Trust procedures, the fair value of portfolio securities held by the Fund.

## **TAXES**

The following is a summary of certain additional tax considerations generally affecting each Fund and its shareholders that are not described in the Prospectus. No attempt is made to present a detailed explanation of the tax treatment of the Fund or its shareholders, and the discussion here and in the Prospectus is not intended as a substitute for careful tax planning.

This “Taxes” section is based on the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended (the “Code”) and applicable regulations in effect on the date of this SAI. Future legislative, regulatory, or administrative changes, including provisions of current law that sunset and thereafter no longer apply, or court decisions may significantly change the tax rules applicable to the Fund and its shareholders. Any of these changes or court decisions may have a retroactive effect.

***This is for general information only and not tax advice. All investors should consult their own tax advisors as to the federal, state, local and foreign tax provisions applicable to them.***

## **Taxation of the Fund**

*The Fund is a Separate Corporation.* The Fund is treated as a separate corporation for federal income tax purposes. Losses in one Fund do not offset gains in another Fund and the requirements (other than certain organizational requirements) for qualifying for regulated investment company status as described below are determined at the Fund level rather than the Trust level.

*Election to be Taxed as a Regulated Investment Company.* The Fund has elected and intends to qualify, or, if newly organized, intends to elect and qualify, each year as a regulated investment company (sometimes referred to as a “regulated investment company,” “RIC” or “fund”) under Subchapter M of the Code. If the Fund so qualifies, the Fund will not be subject to federal income tax on the portion of its investment company taxable income (that is, generally, taxable interest, dividends, net short-term capital gains, and other taxable ordinary income, net of expenses, without regard to the deduction for dividends paid) and net capital gain (that is, the excess of net long-term capital gains over net short-term capital losses) that it distributes to shareholders.

In order to qualify for treatment as a regulated investment company, the Fund must satisfy the following requirements:

1. **Distribution Requirement** —the Fund must distribute an amount equal to the sum of at least 90% of its investment company taxable income and 90% of its net tax-exempt income, if any, for the tax year (including, for purposes of satisfying this distribution requirement, certain distributions made by the Fund after the close of its taxable year that are treated as made during such taxable year).
2. **Income Requirement** —the Fund must derive at least 90% of its gross income from dividends, interest, certain payments with respect to securities loans, and gains from the sale or other disposition of stock, securities or foreign currencies, or other income (including, but not limited to, gains from options, futures or forward contracts) derived from its business of investing in such stock, securities or currencies and net income derived from qualified publicly traded partnerships (“QPTPs”).
3. **Asset Diversification Test** —the Fund must satisfy the following asset diversification test at the close of each quarter of the Fund’s tax year: (1) at least 50% of the value of the Fund’s assets must consist of cash and cash items, U.S. government securities, securities of other regulated investment companies, and securities of other issuers (as to which the Fund has not invested more than 5% of the value of the Fund’s total assets in securities of an issuer and as to which the Fund does not hold more than 10% of the outstanding voting securities of the issuer); and (2) no more than 25% of the value of the Fund’s total assets may be invested in the securities of any one issuer (other than U.S. government securities or securities of other regulated investment companies) or of two or more issuers which the Fund controls and which are engaged in the same or similar trades or businesses, or, in the securities of one or more QPTPs.

In some circumstances, the character and timing of income realized by the Fund for purposes of the Income Requirement or the identification of the issuer for purposes of the Asset Diversification Test is uncertain under current law with respect to a particular investment, and an adverse determination or future guidance by the Internal Revenue Service (“IRS”) with respect to such type of investment may adversely affect the Fund’s ability to satisfy these requirements. See, “Tax Treatment of Portfolio Transactions” below with respect to the application of these requirements to certain types of investments. In other circumstances, the Fund may be required to sell portfolio holdings in order to meet the Income Requirement, Distribution Requirement, or Asset Diversification Test, which may have a negative impact on the Fund’s income and performance.

If for any taxable year the Fund does not qualify as a regulated investment company, all of its taxable income (including its net capital gain) would be subject to tax at the corporate income tax rate without any deduction for dividends paid to shareholders, and the dividends would be taxable to the shareholders as ordinary income (or possibly as qualified dividend

income) to the extent of the Fund's current and accumulated earnings and profits. Failure to qualify as a regulated investment company would thus have a negative impact on the Fund's income and performance. Subject to savings provisions for certain failures to satisfy the Income Requirement or Asset Diversification Test, which, in general, are limited to those due to reasonable cause and not willful neglect, it is possible that the Fund will not qualify as a regulated investment company in any given tax year. Even if such savings provisions apply, the Fund may be subject to a monetary sanction of \$50,000 or more. Moreover, the Board reserves the right not to maintain the qualification of the Fund as a regulated investment company if it determines such a course of action to be beneficial to shareholders.

*Portfolio Turnover.* For investors that hold their Fund Shares in a taxable account, a high portfolio turnover rate may result in higher taxes. This is because a fund with a high turnover rate is likely to accelerate the recognition of capital gains and more of such gains are likely to be taxable as short-term rather than long-term capital gains in contrast to a comparable fund with a low turnover rate. Any such higher taxes would reduce the Fund's after-tax performance. See, "Taxation of Fund Distributions - Distributions of Capital Gains" below. For non-U.S. investors, any such acceleration of the recognition of capital gains that results in more short-term and less long-term capital gains being recognized by the Fund may cause such investors to be subject to increased U.S. withholding taxes. See, "Non-U.S. Investors – Capital Gain Dividends" and "–Interest-Related Dividends and Short-Term Capital Gain Dividends" below.

*Capital Loss Carryovers.* The capital losses of the Fund, if any, do not flow through to shareholders. Rather, the Fund may use its capital losses, subject to applicable limitations, to offset its capital gains without being required to pay taxes on or distribute to shareholders such gains that are offset by the losses. If the Fund has a "net capital loss" (that is, capital losses in excess of capital gains), the excess (if any) of the Fund's net short-term capital losses over its net long-term capital gains is treated as a short-term capital loss arising on the first day of the Fund's next taxable year, and the excess (if any) of the Fund's net long-term capital losses over its net short-term capital gains is treated as a long-term capital loss arising on the first day of the Fund's next taxable year. Any such net capital losses of the Fund that are not used to offset capital gains may be carried forward indefinitely to reduce any future capital gains realized by the Fund in succeeding taxable years. The amount of capital losses that can be carried forward and used in any single year is subject to an annual limitation if there is a more than 50% "change in ownership" of the Fund. An ownership change generally results when shareholders owning 5% or more of the Fund increase their aggregate holdings by more than 50% over a three-year lookback period. An ownership change could result in capital loss carryovers being used at a slower rate, thereby reducing the Fund's ability to offset capital gains with those losses. An increase in the amount of taxable gains distributed to the Fund's shareholders could result from an ownership change. The Fund undertakes no obligation to avoid or prevent an ownership change, which can occur in the normal course of shareholder purchases and redemptions or as a result of engaging in a tax-free reorganization with another fund. Moreover, because of circumstances beyond the Fund's control, there can be no assurance that the Fund will not experience, or has not already experienced, an ownership change. Additionally, if the Fund engages in a tax-free reorganization with another fund, the effect of these and other rules not discussed herein may be to disallow or postpone the use by the Fund of its capital loss carryovers (including any current year losses and built-in losses when realized) to offset its own gains or those of the other fund, or vice versa, thereby reducing the tax benefits Fund shareholders would otherwise have enjoyed from use of such capital loss carryovers. As of December 31, 2023, the Fund had \$50,762,321 in short-term capital loss carryforwards and \$28,074,160 in long-term capital loss carryforwards. These capital loss carryforwards do not expire.

*Deferral of Late Year Losses.* The Fund may elect to treat part or all of any "qualified late year loss" as if it had been incurred in the succeeding taxable year in determining the Fund's taxable income, net capital gain, net short-term capital gain, and earnings and profits. The effect of this election is to treat any such "qualified late year loss" as if it had been incurred in the succeeding taxable year in characterizing Fund distributions for any calendar year (see, "Taxation of Fund Distributions—Distributions of capital gains" below). A "qualified late year loss" includes:

- any net capital loss incurred after October 31 of the current taxable year, or, if there is no such loss, any net long-term capital loss or any net short-term capital loss incurred after October 31 of the current taxable year ("post-October capital losses"), and



- the sum of (1) the excess, if any, of (a) specified losses incurred after October 31 of the current taxable year, over (b) specified gains incurred after October 31 of the current taxable year and (2) the excess, if any, of (a) ordinary losses incurred after December 31 of the current taxable year, over (b) the ordinary income incurred after December 31 of the current taxable year.

The terms “specified losses” and “specified gains” mean ordinary losses and gains from the sale, exchange, or other disposition of property (including the termination of a position with respect to such property), foreign currency losses and gains, and losses and gains resulting from holding stock in a passive foreign investment company (“PFIC”) for which a mark-to-market election is in effect. The terms “ordinary losses” and “ordinary income” mean other ordinary losses and income that are not described in the preceding sentence.

*Undistributed Capital Gains.* The Fund may retain or distribute to shareholders its net capital gain for each taxable year. The Fund currently intends to distribute net capital gains. If the Fund elects to retain its net capital gain, the Fund will be taxed thereon (except to the extent of any available capital loss carryovers) at the corporate income tax rate. If the Fund elects to retain its net capital gain, it is expected that the Fund also will elect to have shareholders treated as if each received a distribution of its pro rata share of such gain, with the result that each shareholder will be required to report its pro rata share of such gain on its tax return as long-term capital gain, will receive a refundable tax credit for its pro rata share of tax paid by the Fund on the gain, and will increase the tax basis for its Shares by an amount equal to the deemed distribution less the tax credit.

*Federal Excise Tax.* To avoid a 4% non-deductible excise tax, the Fund must distribute by December 31 of each year an amount equal to at least: (1) 98% of its ordinary income for the calendar year, (2) 98.2% of capital gain net income (that is, the excess of the gains from sales or exchanges of capital assets over the losses from such sales or exchanges) for the one-year period ended on October 31 of such calendar year, and (3) any prior year undistributed ordinary income and capital gain net income. The Fund may elect to defer to the following year any net ordinary loss incurred for the portion of the calendar year which is after the beginning of the Fund’s taxable year. Also, the Fund will defer any “specified gain” or “specified loss” which would be properly taken into account for the portion of the calendar year after October 31. Any net ordinary loss, specified gain, or specified loss deferred shall be treated as arising on January 1 of the following calendar year. Generally, the Fund intends to make sufficient distributions prior to the end of each calendar year to avoid any material liability for federal income and excise tax but can give no assurances that all or a portion of such liability will be avoided. In addition, under certain circumstances, temporary timing, or permanent differences in the realization of income and expense for book and tax purposes can result in the Fund having to pay an excise tax.

*Foreign income tax.* Investment income received by the Fund from sources within foreign countries may be subject to foreign income tax withheld at the source and the amount of tax withheld generally will be treated as an expense of the Fund. The U.S. has entered into tax treaties with many foreign countries that entitle the Fund to a reduced rate of, or exemption from, tax on such income. Some countries require the filing of a tax reclaim or other forms to receive the benefit of the reduced tax rate; whether or when the Fund will receive the tax reclaim is within the control of the individual country. Information required on these forms may not be available such as shareholder information; therefore, the Fund may not receive the reduced treaty rates or potential reclaims. Other countries have conflicting and changing instructions and restrictive timing requirements which may cause the Fund not to receive the reduced treaty rates or potential reclaims. Other countries may subject capital gains realized by the Fund on sale or disposition of securities of that country to taxation. It is impossible to determine the effective rate of foreign tax in advance since the amount of the Fund’s assets to be invested in various countries is not known.

*Purchase of Shares.* As a result of tax requirements, the Trust on behalf of each Fund, has the right to reject an order to purchase Shares if the purchaser (or group of purchasers acting in concert with each other) would, upon obtaining the Shares so ordered, own 80% or more of the outstanding Shares of the Fund and if, pursuant to Sections 351 and 362 of the Code, the Fund would have a basis in the Deposit Securities different from the market value of such securities on the date of deposit. The Trust also has the right to require information necessary to determine beneficial Share ownership for purposes of the 80% determination.

## Taxation of Fund Distributions

The Fund anticipates distributing substantially all of its investment company taxable income and net capital gain for each taxable year. Distributions by the Fund will be treated in the manner described below regardless of whether such distributions are paid in cash or reinvested in additional Shares of the Fund (or of another fund). You will receive information annually as to the federal income tax consequences of distributions made (or deemed made) during the year.

*Distributions of Net Investment Income.* The Fund receives ordinary income generally in the form of dividends and/or interest on its investments. The Fund may also recognize ordinary income from other sources, including, but not limited to, certain gains on foreign currency-related transactions. This income, less expenses incurred in the operation of the Fund, constitutes the Fund's net investment income from which dividends may be paid to you. If you are a taxable investor, distributions of net investment income generally are taxable as ordinary income to the extent of the Fund's earnings and profits. See the discussion below under the headings, "Qualified Dividend Income for Individuals" and "Dividends-Received Deduction for Corporations."

*Distributions of Capital Gains.* The Fund may derive capital gain and loss in connection with sales or other dispositions of its portfolio securities. Distributions derived from the excess of net short-term capital gain over net long-term capital loss will be taxable to you as ordinary income. Distributions paid from the excess of net long-term capital gain over net short-term capital loss will be taxable to you as long-term capital gain, regardless of how long you have held your Shares in the Fund. Any net short-term or long-term capital gain realized by the Fund (net of any capital loss carryovers) generally will be distributed once each year and may be distributed more frequently, if necessary, in order to reduce or eliminate federal excise or income taxes on the Fund.

*Returns of Capital.* Distributions by the Fund that are not paid from earnings and profits will be treated as a return of capital to the extent of (and in reduction of) the shareholder's tax basis in his Shares; any excess will be treated as gain from the sale of his Shares. Thus, the portion of a distribution that constitutes a return of capital will decrease the shareholder's tax basis in his Fund Shares (but not below zero) and will result in an increase in the amount of gain (or decrease in the amount of loss) that will be recognized by the shareholder for tax purposes on the later sale of such Fund Shares. Return of capital distributions can occur for a number of reasons including, among others, the Fund over-estimates the income to be received from certain investments such as those classified as partnerships or equity real estate investment trusts ("REITs").

*Qualified Dividend Income for Individuals.* Ordinary income dividends reported as derived from qualified dividend income will be taxed in the hands of individuals and other noncorporate shareholders at the rates applicable to long-term capital gain. "Qualified dividend income" means dividends paid to the Fund (a) by domestic corporations, (b) by foreign corporations that are either (i) incorporated in a possession of the United States, or (ii) are eligible for benefits under certain income tax treaties with the United States that include an exchange of information program, or (c) with respect to stock of a foreign corporation that is readily tradable on an established securities market in the United States. Both the Fund and the investor must meet certain holding period requirements to qualify Fund dividends for this treatment. Specifically, the Fund must hold the stock for at least 61 days during the 121-day period beginning 60 days before the stock becomes ex-dividend. Similarly, investors must hold their Fund Shares for at least 61 days during the 121-day period beginning 60 days before the Fund distribution goes ex-dividend. Income derived from investments in derivatives, fixed-income securities, U.S. REITs, PFICs, and income received "in lieu of" dividends in a securities lending transaction generally is not eligible for treatment as qualified dividend income. If the qualifying dividend income received by the Fund is equal to or greater than 95% of the Fund's gross income (exclusive of net capital gain) in any taxable year, all of the ordinary income dividends paid by the Fund will be qualifying dividend income.

*Dividends-Received Deduction for Corporations.* For corporate shareholders, a portion of the dividends paid by the Fund may qualify for the 50% corporate dividends-received deduction. The portion of dividends paid by the Fund that so qualifies will be reported by the Fund each year and cannot exceed the gross amount of dividends received by the Fund from domestic (U.S.) corporations. The availability of the dividends-received deduction is subject to certain holding period and debt financing restrictions that apply to both the Fund and the investor. Specifically, the amount that the Fund may report as eligible

for the dividends-received deduction will be reduced or eliminated if the Shares on which the dividends earned by the Fund were debt-financed or held by the Fund for less than a minimum period of time, generally 46 days during a 91-day period beginning 45 days before the stock becomes ex-dividend. Similarly, if your Fund Shares are debt-financed or held by you for less than a 46-day period then the dividends-received deduction for Fund dividends on your Shares may also be reduced or eliminated. Income derived by the Fund from investments in derivatives, fixed-income and foreign securities generally is not eligible for this treatment.

*Qualified REIT dividends.* Under 2017 legislation commonly known as the “Tax Cuts and Jobs Act,” “qualified REIT dividends” (i.e., ordinary REIT dividends other than capital gain dividends and portions of REIT dividends designated as qualified dividend income) are treated as eligible for a 20% deduction by noncorporate taxpayers. The Fund may choose to report the special character of qualified REIT dividends to its shareholders, provided both the Fund and the shareholder meet certain holding period requirements. The amount of a RIC’s dividends eligible for the 20% deduction for a taxable year is limited to the excess of the RIC’s qualified REIT dividends for the taxable year over allocable expenses. A noncorporate shareholder receiving such dividends would treat them as eligible for the 20% deduction, provided the shareholder meets certain holding period requirements for its shares in the RIC (i.e., generally, RIC shares must be held by the shareholder for more than 45 days during the 91-day period beginning on the date that is 45 days before the date on which the shares become ex-dividend with respect to such dividend).

*Impact of Realized but Undistributed Income and Gains, and Net Unrealized Appreciation of Portfolio Securities.* At the time of your purchase of Shares, the price of Shares may reflect undistributed income, undistributed capital gains, or net unrealized appreciation of portfolio securities held by the Fund. A subsequent distribution to you of such amounts, although constituting a return of your investment, would be taxable, and would be taxed as ordinary income (some portion of which may be taxed as qualified dividend income), capital gains, or some combination of both, unless you are investing through a tax-advantaged arrangement, such as a 401(k) plan or an individual retirement account. The Fund may be able to reduce the amount of such distributions from capital gains by utilizing its capital loss carryovers, if any.

*U.S. Government Securities.* Income earned on certain U.S. government obligations is exempt from state and local personal income taxes if earned directly by you. States also grant tax-free status to dividends paid to you from interest earned on direct obligations of the U.S. government, subject in some states to minimum investment or reporting requirements that must be met by the Fund. Income on investments by the Fund in certain other obligations, such as repurchase agreements collateralized by U.S. government obligations, commercial paper, and federal agency-backed obligations (e.g., GNMA or FNMA obligations), generally does not qualify for tax-free treatment. The rules on exclusion of this income are different for corporations.

*Dividends Declared in December and Paid in January.* Ordinarily, shareholders are required to take distributions by the Fund into account in the year in which the distributions are made. However, dividends declared in October, November, or December of any year and payable to shareholders of record on a specified date in such a month will be deemed to have been received by the shareholders (and made by the Fund) on December 31 of such calendar year if such dividends are actually paid in January of the following year. Shareholders will be advised annually as to the U.S. federal income tax consequences of distributions made (or deemed made) during the year in accordance with the guidance that has been provided by the IRS.

*Medicare Tax.* A 3.8% Medicare tax is imposed on net investment income earned by certain individuals, estates, and trusts. “Net investment income,” for these purposes, means investment income, including ordinary dividends and capital gain distributions received from the Fund and net gains from taxable dispositions of Fund Shares, reduced by the deductions properly allocable to such income. In the case of an individual, the tax will be imposed on the lesser of (1) the shareholder’s net investment income or (2) the amount by which the shareholder’s modified adjusted gross income exceeds \$250,000 (if the shareholder is married and filing jointly or a surviving spouse), \$125,000 (if the shareholder is married and filing separately) or \$200,000 (in any other case). This Medicare tax, if applicable, is reported by you on, and paid with, your federal income tax return.

## **Sales of Fund Shares**

Sales of Fund Shares are taxable transactions for federal and state income tax purposes. If you sell your Fund Shares, the IRS requires you to report any gain or loss on your sale. If you held your Shares as a capital asset, the gain or loss that you realize will be a capital gain or loss and will be long-term or short-term, generally depending on how long you have held your Shares. Capital losses in any year are deductible only to the extent of capital gains plus, in the case of a noncorporate taxpayer, \$3,000 of ordinary income.

*Taxes on Purchase and Redemption of Creation Units.* An Authorized Participant who exchanges equity securities for Creation Units generally will recognize a gain or a loss. The gain or loss will be equal to the difference between the market value of the Creation Units at the time of purchase (plus any cash received by the Authorized Participant as part of the issue) and the Authorized Participant's aggregate basis in the securities surrendered (plus any cash paid by the Authorized Participant as part of the issue). An Authorized Participant who exchanges Creation Units for equity securities generally will recognize a gain or loss equal to the difference between the Authorized Participant's basis in the Creation Units (plus any cash paid by the Authorized Participant as part of the redemption) and the aggregate market value of the securities received (plus any cash received by the Authorized Participant as part of the redemption). The IRS, however, may assert that a loss realized upon an exchange of securities for Creation Units cannot be deducted currently under the rules governing "wash sales," or on the basis that there has been no significant change in economic position. Persons exchanging securities should consult their own tax advisor with respect to whether wash sale rules apply and when a loss might be deductible.

Under current federal tax laws, any capital gain or loss realized upon redemption of Creation Units is generally treated as long-term capital gain or loss if the Shares have been held for more than one year and as a short-term capital gain or loss if the Shares have been held for one year or less.

If the Fund redeems Creation Units in cash, it may recognize more capital gains than it will if it redeems Creation Units in-kind.

*Tax Basis Information.* A shareholder's cost basis information will be provided on the sale of any of the shareholder's Shares, subject to certain exceptions for exempt recipients. Please contact the broker (or other nominee) that holds your Shares with respect to reporting of cost basis and available elections for your account.

*Wash Sales.* All or a portion of any loss that you realize on a sale of your Fund Shares will be disallowed to the extent that you buy other Shares in the Fund (through reinvestment of dividends or otherwise) within 30 days before or after your Share sale. Any loss disallowed under these rules will be added to your tax basis in the new Shares.

*Sales at a Loss Within Six Months of Purchase.* Any loss incurred on a sale of Shares held for six months or less will be treated as long-term capital loss to the extent of any long-term capital gain distributed to you by the Fund on those Shares.

*Reportable Transactions.* Under Treasury regulations, if a shareholder recognizes a loss with respect to the Fund's Shares of \$2 million or more for an individual shareholder or \$10 million or more for a corporate shareholder (or certain greater amounts over a combination of years), the shareholder must file with the IRS a disclosure statement on Form 8886. The fact that a loss is reportable under these regulations does not affect the legal determination of whether the taxpayer's treatment of the loss is proper. Shareholders should consult their tax advisors to determine the applicability of these regulations in light of their individual circumstances.

## **Tax Treatment of Portfolio Transactions**

Set forth below is a general description of the tax treatment of certain types of securities, investment techniques and transactions that may apply to the Fund and, in turn, affect the amount, character and timing of dividends and distributions payable by the fund to its shareholders. This section should be read in conjunction with the discussion above under "Investment Strategies" for a detailed description of the various types of securities and investment techniques that apply to the Fund.

*In General.* In general, gain or loss recognized by the Fund on the sale or other disposition of portfolio investments will be a capital gain or loss. Such capital gain and loss may be long-term or short-term depending, in general, upon the length of time a particular investment position is maintained and, in some cases, upon the nature of the transaction. Property held for more than one year generally will be eligible for long-term capital gain or loss treatment. The application of certain rules described below may serve to alter the manner in which the holding period for a security is determined or may otherwise affect the characterization as long-term or short-term, and also the timing of the realization and/or character, of certain gains or losses.

*Certain Fixed Income Investments.* Gain recognized on the disposition of a debt obligation purchased by the Fund at a market discount (generally, at a price less than its principal amount) will be treated as ordinary income to the extent of the portion of the market discount that accrued during the period of time the fund held the debt obligation unless the fund made a current inclusion election to accrue market discount into income as it accrues. If the Fund purchases a debt obligation (such as a zero-coupon security or payment-in-kind security) that was originally issued at a discount, the Fund generally is required to include in gross income each year the portion of the original issue discount that accrues during such year. Therefore, the Fund's investment in such securities may cause the Fund to recognize income and make distributions to shareholders before it receives any cash payments on the securities. To generate cash to satisfy those distribution requirements, the Fund may have to sell portfolio securities that it otherwise might have continued to hold or to use cash flows from other sources such as the sale of fund shares.

*Investments in Debt Obligations that are at Risk of or in Default Present Tax Issues for the Fund.* Tax rules are not entirely clear about issues such as whether and to what extent the Fund should recognize market discount on a debt obligation, when the Fund may cease to accrue interest, original issue discount or market discount, when and to what extent the Fund may take deductions for bad debts or worthless securities and how the Fund should allocate payments received on obligations in default between principal and income. These and other related issues will be addressed by the Fund in order to ensure that it distributes sufficient income to preserve its status as a regulated investment company.

*Options, Futures, Forward Contracts, Swap Agreements and Hedging Transactions.* In general, option premiums received by the Fund are not immediately included in the income of the fund. Instead, the premiums are recognized when the option contract expires, the option is exercised by the holder, or the fund transfers or otherwise terminates the option (e.g., through a closing transaction). If an option written by the Fund is exercised and the fund sells or delivers the underlying stock, the fund generally will recognize capital gain or loss equal to (a) the sum of the strike price and the option premium received by the fund minus (b) the fund's basis in the stock. Such gain or loss generally will be short-term or long-term depending upon the holding period of the underlying stock. If securities are purchased by the Fund pursuant to the exercise of a put option written by it, the fund generally will subtract the premium received from its cost basis in the securities purchased. The gain or loss with respect to any termination of the Fund's obligation under an option other than through the exercise of the option and related sale or delivery of the underlying stock generally will be short-term gain or loss depending on whether the premium income received by the fund is greater or less than the amount paid by the fund (if any) in terminating the transaction. Thus, for example, if an option written by the Fund expires unexercised, the Fund generally will recognize short-term gain equal to the premium received.

The tax treatment of certain futures contracts entered into by the Fund as well as listed non-equity options written or purchased by the fund on U.S. exchanges (including options on futures contracts, broad-based equity indices and debt securities) may be governed by section 1256 of the Code ("section 1256 contracts"). Gains or losses on section 1256 contracts generally are considered 60% long-term and 40% short-term capital gains or losses ("60/40"), although certain foreign currency gains and losses from such contracts may be treated as ordinary in character. Also, any section 1256 contracts held by the Fund at the end of each taxable year (and, for purposes of the 4% excise tax, on certain other dates as prescribed under the Code) are "marked to market" with the result that unrealized gains or losses are treated as though they were realized and the resulting gain or loss is treated as ordinary or 60/40 gain or loss, as applicable. Section 1256 contracts do not include any interest rate swap, currency swap, basis swap, interest rate cap, interest rate floor, commodity swap, equity swap, equity index swap, credit default swap, or similar agreement.

In addition to the special rules described above in respect of options and futures transactions, the Fund's transactions in other derivative instruments (including options, forward contracts, and swap agreements) as well as its other hedging, short sale, or similar transactions, may be subject to one or more special tax rules (including the constructive sale, notional principal contract, straddle, wash sale and short sale rules). These rules may affect whether gains and losses recognized by the Fund are treated as ordinary or capital or as short-term or long-term, accelerate the recognition of income or gains to the fund, defer losses to the fund, and cause adjustments in the holding periods of the fund's securities. These rules, therefore, could affect the amount, timing and/or character of distributions to shareholders. Moreover, because the tax rules applicable to derivative instruments are in some cases uncertain under current law, an adverse determination or future guidance by the IRS with respect to these rules (which determination or guidance could be retroactive) may affect whether the Fund has made sufficient distributions, and otherwise satisfied the relevant requirements, to maintain its qualification as a regulated investment company and avoid the Fund-level tax.

Certain of the Fund's investments in derivatives and foreign currency-denominated instruments, and the fund's transactions in foreign currencies and hedging activities, may produce a difference between its book income and its taxable income. If the Fund's book income is less than the sum of its taxable income and net tax-exempt income (if any), the fund could be required to make distributions exceeding book income to qualify as a regulated investment company. If the Fund's book income exceeds the sum of its taxable income and net tax-exempt income (if any), the distribution of any such excess will be treated as (i) a dividend to the extent of the fund's remaining earnings and profits (including current earnings and profits arising from tax-exempt income, reduced by related deductions), (ii) thereafter, as a return of capital to the extent of the recipient's basis in the Shares, and (iii) thereafter, as gain from the sale or exchange of a capital asset.

*Investments in U.S. REITs.* A U.S. REIT is not subject to federal income tax on the income and gains it distributes to shareholders. Dividends paid by a U.S. REIT, other than capital gain distributions, will be taxable as ordinary income up to the amount of the U.S. REIT's current and accumulated earnings and profits. Capital gain dividends paid by a U.S. REIT to the Fund will be treated as long-term capital gains by the Fund and, in turn, may be distributed by the Fund to its shareholders as a capital gain distribution. Because of certain noncash expenses, such as property depreciation, an equity U.S. REIT's cash flow may exceed its taxable income. The equity U.S. REIT, and in turn the Fund, may distribute this excess cash to shareholders in the form of a return of capital distribution. However, if a U.S. REIT is operated in a manner that fails to qualify as a REIT, an investment in the U.S. REIT would become subject to double taxation, meaning the taxable income of the U.S. REIT would be subject to federal income tax at the corporate income tax rate without any deduction for dividends paid to shareholders and the dividends would be taxable to shareholders as ordinary income (or possibly as qualified dividend income) to the extent of the U.S. REIT's current and accumulated earnings and profits. Also, see, "Tax Treatment of Portfolio Transactions – Investment in taxable mortgage pools (excess inclusion income)" and "Non-U.S. Investors – Investment in U.S. real property" below with respect to certain other tax aspects of investing in U.S. REITs.

*Investment in non-U.S. REITs.* While non-U.S. REITs often use complex acquisition structures that seek to minimize taxation in the source country, an investment by the Fund in a non-U.S. REIT may subject the Fund, directly or indirectly, to corporate taxes, withholding taxes, transfer taxes and other indirect taxes in the country in which the real estate acquired by the non-U.S. REIT is located. The Fund's pro rata share of any such taxes will reduce the Fund's return on its investment. The Fund's investment in a non-U.S. REIT may be considered an investment in a PFIC, as discussed above in "PFIC investments." Additionally, foreign withholding taxes on distributions from the non-U.S. REIT may be reduced or eliminated under certain tax treaties, as discussed above in "Taxation of the Fund — Foreign income tax." Also, the Fund in certain limited circumstances may be required to file an income tax return in the source country and pay tax on any gain realized from its investment in the non-U.S. REIT under rules similar to those in the U.S., which tax foreign persons on gain realized from dispositions of interests in U.S. real estate.

*Investment in taxable mortgage pools (excess inclusion income).* Under a Notice issued by the IRS, the Code and Treasury regulations to be issued, a portion of the Fund's income from a U.S. REIT that is attributable to the REIT's residual interest in a real estate mortgage investment conduit ("REMIC") or equity interests in a "taxable mortgage pool" (referred to in the Code as an excess inclusion) will be subject to federal income tax in all events. The excess inclusion income of a regulated

investment company, such as the Fund, will be allocated to shareholders of the regulated investment company in proportion to the dividends received by such shareholders, with the same consequences as if the shareholders held the related REMIC residual interest or, if applicable, taxable mortgage pool directly. In general, excess inclusion income allocated to shareholders (i) cannot be offset by net operating losses (subject to a limited exception for certain thrift institutions), (ii) will constitute unrelated business taxable income (“UBTI”) to entities (including qualified pension plans, individual retirement accounts, 401(k) plans, Keogh plans or other tax-exempt entities) subject to tax on UBTI, thereby potentially requiring such an entity that is allocated excess inclusion income, and otherwise might not be required to file a tax return, to file a tax return and pay tax on such income, and (iii) in the case of a foreign stockholder, will not qualify for any reduction in U.S. federal withholding tax. In addition, if at any time during any taxable year a “disqualified organization” (which generally includes certain cooperatives, governmental entities, and tax-exempt organizations not subject to UBTI) is a record holder of a share in a regulated investment company, then the regulated investment company will be subject to a tax equal to that portion of its excess inclusion income for the taxable year that is allocable to the disqualified organization, multiplied by the corporate income tax rate. The Notice imposes certain reporting requirements upon regulated investment companies that have excess inclusion income. There can be no assurance that the Fund will not allocate to shareholders excess inclusion income.

*Foreign currency transactions.* The Fund’s transactions in foreign currencies, foreign currency-denominated debt obligations and certain foreign currency options, futures contracts, and forward contracts (and similar instruments) may give rise to ordinary income or loss to the extent such income or loss results from fluctuations in the value of the foreign currency concerned. This treatment could increase or decrease a fund's ordinary income distributions to you and may cause some or all of the fund's previously distributed income to be classified as a return of capital. In certain cases, a fund may make an election to treat such gain or loss as capital.

*PFIC investments.* The Fund may invest in securities of foreign companies that may be classified under the Code as PFICs. In general, a foreign company is classified as a PFIC if at least one-half of its assets constitute investment-type assets or 75% or more of its gross income is investment-type income. When investing in PFIC securities, a fund intends to mark-to-market these securities under certain provisions of the Code and recognize any unrealized gains as ordinary income at the end of the fund’s fiscal and excise tax years. Deductions for losses are allowable only to the extent of any current or previously recognized gains. These gains (reduced by allowable losses) are treated as ordinary income that a fund is required to distribute, even though it has not sold or received dividends from these securities. You should also be aware that the designation of a foreign security as a PFIC security will cause its income dividends to fall outside of the definition of qualified foreign corporation dividends. These dividends generally will not qualify for the reduced rate of taxation on qualified dividends when distributed to you by a fund. Foreign companies are not required to identify themselves as PFICs. Due to various complexities in identifying PFICs, a fund can give no assurances that it will be able to identify portfolio securities in foreign corporations that are PFICs in time for the fund to make a mark-to-market election. If a fund is unable to identify an investment as a PFIC and thus does not make a mark-to-market election, the fund may be subject to U.S. federal income tax on a portion of any “excess distribution” or gain from the disposition of such shares even if such income is distributed as a taxable dividend by the fund to its shareholders. Additional charges in the nature of interest may be imposed on a fund in respect of deferred taxes arising from such distributions or gains.

*Securities Lending.* While securities are loaned out by the Fund, the fund generally will receive from the borrower amounts equal to any dividends or interest paid on the borrowed securities. For federal income tax purposes, payments made “in lieu of” dividends are not considered dividend income. These distributions will neither qualify for the reduced rate of taxation for individuals on qualified dividends nor the 50% dividends-received deduction for corporations. Also, any foreign tax withheld on payments made “in lieu of” dividends or interest will not qualify for the pass-through of foreign tax credits to shareholders.

*Investments in Convertible Securities.* Convertible debt is ordinarily treated as a “single property” consisting of a pure debt interest until conversion, after which the investment becomes an equity interest. If the security is issued at a premium (i.e., for cash in excess of the face amount payable on retirement), the creditor-holder may amortize the premium over the life of the bond. If the security is issued for cash at a price below its face amount, the creditor-holder must accrue original issue discount in income over the life of the debt. The creditor-holder’s exercise of the conversion privilege is treated as a nontaxable

event. Mandatorily convertible debt (e.g., an exchange traded note or ETN issued in the form of an unsecured obligation that pays a return based on the performance of a specified market index, exchange currency, or commodity) is often, but not always, treated as a contract to buy or sell the reference property rather than debt. Similarly, convertible preferred stock with a mandatory conversion feature is ordinarily, but not always, treated as equity rather than debt. Dividends received generally are qualified dividend income and eligible for the corporate dividends-received deduction. In general, conversion of preferred stock for common stock of the same corporation is tax-free. Conversion of preferred stock for cash is a taxable redemption. Any redemption premium for preferred stock that is redeemable by the issuing company might be required to be amortized under original issue discount principles.

*Investments in partnerships and QPTPs.* For purposes of the Income Requirement, income derived by a fund from a partnership that is not a QPTP will be treated as qualifying income only to the extent such income is attributable to items of income of the partnership that would be qualifying income if realized directly by the fund. While the rules are not entirely clear with respect to a fund investing in a partnership outside a master feeder structure, for purposes of testing whether a fund satisfies the Asset Diversification Test, the fund generally is treated as owning a pro rata share of the underlying assets of a partnership. See, “Taxation of the Fund.” In contrast, different rules apply to a partnership that is a QPTP. A QPTP is a partnership (a) the interests in which are traded on an established securities market, (b) that is treated as a partnership for federal income tax purposes, and (c) that derives less than 90% of its income from sources that satisfy the Income Requirement (e.g., because it invests in commodities). All of the net income derived by a fund from an interest in a QPTP will be treated as qualifying income but the fund may not invest more than 25% of its total assets in one or more QPTPs. However, there can be no assurance that a partnership classified as a QPTP in one year will qualify as a QPTP in the next year. Any such failure to annually qualify as a QPTP might, in turn, cause a fund to fail to qualify as a regulated investment company. Although, in general, the passive loss rules of the Code do not apply to RICs, such rules do apply to a fund with respect to items attributable to an interest in a QPTP. Fund investments in partnerships, including in QPTPs, may result in the fund being subject to state, local or foreign income, franchise or withholding tax liabilities.

If an MLP is treated as a partnership for U.S. federal income tax purposes (whether or not a QPTP), all or portion of the dividends received by a fund from the MLP likely will be treated as a return of capital for U.S. federal income tax purposes because of accelerated deductions available with respect to the activities of such MLPs. Further, because of these accelerated deductions, on the disposition of interests in such an MLP, a fund likely will realize taxable income in excess of economic gain with respect to those MLP interests (or if the fund does not dispose of the MLP, the fund could realize taxable income in excess of cash flow with respect to the MLP in a later period), and the fund must take such income into account in determining whether the fund has satisfied its Distribution Requirement. A fund may have to borrow or liquidate securities to satisfy its Distribution Requirement and to meet its redemption requests, even though investment considerations might otherwise make it undesirable for the fund to sell securities or borrow money at such time. In addition, any gain recognized, either upon the sale of a fund’s MLP interest or sale by the MLP of property held by it, including in excess of economic gain thereon, treated as so-called “recapture income,” will be treated as ordinary income. Therefore, to the extent a fund invests in MLPs, fund shareholders might receive greater amounts of distributions from the fund taxable as ordinary income than they otherwise would in the absence of such MLP investments.

Recent legislation (which by its terms became effective for taxable years beginning after December 31, 2017) generally requires that taxes, penalties, and interest associated with an audit of a partnership be assessed and collected at the partnership level. Therefore, an adverse federal income tax audit of a partnership that the Fund invests in (including MLPs taxed as partnerships) could result in the Fund being required to pay federal income tax. The Fund may have little input in any audit asserted against a partnership and may be contractually or legally obligated to make payments in regard to deficiencies asserted without the ability to put forward an independent defense. Accordingly, even if a partnership in which the Fund invests were to remain classified as a partnership (instead of as a corporation), it could be required to pay additional taxes, interest and penalties as a result of an audit adjustment, and the Fund, as a direct or indirect partner of such partnership, could be required to bear the economic burden of those taxes, interest and penalties, which would reduce the value of Fund shares.



Although MLPs are generally expected to be treated as partnerships for U.S. federal income tax purposes, some MLPs may be treated as PFICs or “regular” corporations for U.S. federal income tax purposes. The treatment of particular MLPs for U.S. federal income tax purposes will affect the extent to which a fund can invest in MLPs and will impact the amount, character, and timing of income recognized by the Fund.

*Investments in Securities of Uncertain Tax Character.* The Fund may invest in securities the U.S. federal income tax treatment of which may not be clear or may be subject to recharacterization by the IRS. To the extent the tax treatment of such securities or the income from such securities differs from the tax treatment expected by the Fund, it could affect the timing or character of income recognized by the fund, requiring the fund to purchase or sell securities, or otherwise change its portfolio, in order to comply with the tax rules applicable to regulated investment companies under the Code.

## **Backup Withholding**

By law, a portion of your taxable dividends and sales proceeds may be withheld unless you:

- provide your correct social security or taxpayer identification number,
- certify that this number is correct,
- certify that you are not subject to backup withholding, and
- certify that you are a U.S. person (including a U.S. resident alien).

Withholding is also imposed if the IRS requires it. When withholding is required, the amount will be 24% of any distributions or proceeds paid. Backup withholding is not an additional tax. Any amounts withheld may be credited against the shareholder’s U.S. federal income tax liability, provided the appropriate information is furnished to the IRS. Certain payees and payments are exempt from backup withholding and information reporting. The special U.S. tax certification requirements applicable to non-U.S. investors to avoid backup withholding are described under the “Non-U.S. Investors” heading below.

## **Non-U.S. Investors**

Non-U.S. investors (shareholders who, as to the United States, are nonresident alien individuals, foreign trusts or estates, foreign corporations, or foreign partnerships) may be subject to U.S. withholding and estate tax and are subject to special U.S. tax certification requirements. Non-U.S. investors should consult their tax advisors about the applicability of U.S. tax withholding and the use of the appropriate forms to certify their status.

*In General.* The United States imposes a flat 30% withholding tax (or a withholding tax at a lower treaty rate) on U.S. source dividends, including on income dividends paid to you by the Fund, subject to certain exemptions described below. However, notwithstanding such exemptions from U.S. withholding at the source, any dividends and distributions of income and capital gains, including the proceeds from the sale of your Fund Shares, will be subject to backup withholding at a rate of 24% if you fail to properly certify that you are not a U.S. person.

*Capital Gain Dividends.* In general, capital gain dividends reported by the Fund as paid from its net long-term capital gains, other than long-term capital gains realized on disposition of U.S. real property interests (see the discussion below), are not subject to U.S. withholding tax unless you are a nonresident alien individual present in the United States for a period or periods aggregating 183 days or more during the calendar year.

*Interest-related dividends and short-term capital gain dividends.* Generally, dividends reported by the Fund as interest-related dividends and paid from its qualified net interest income from U.S. sources are not subject to U.S. withholding tax. “Qualified interest income” includes, in general, U.S. source (1) bank deposit interest, (2) short-term original discount, (3) interest (including original issue discount, market discount, or acquisition discount) on an obligation that is in registered form, unless it is earned on an obligation issued by a corporation or partnership in which the Fund is a 10-percent shareholder or is contingent interest, and (4) any interest-related dividend from another regulated investment company. Similarly, short-term capital gain dividends reported by the Fund as paid from its net short-term capital gains, other than short-term capital gains realized on disposition of U.S. real property interests (see the discussion below), are not subject to U.S. withholding tax unless

you were a nonresident alien individual present in the United States for a period or periods aggregating 183 days or more during the calendar year. The Fund reserves the right to not report interest-related dividends or short-term capital gain dividends. Additionally, the Fund's reporting of interest-related dividends or short-term capital gain dividends may not be passed through to shareholders by intermediaries who have assumed tax reporting responsibilities for this income in managed or omnibus accounts due to systems limitations or operational constraints.

*Net Investment Income from Dividends on Stock and Foreign Source Interest Income Continue to be Subject to Withholding Tax; Foreign Tax Credits.* Ordinary dividends paid by the Fund to non-U.S. investors on the income earned on portfolio investments in (i) the stock of domestic and foreign corporations and (ii) the debt of foreign issuers continue to be subject to U.S. withholding tax.

Foreign shareholders may be subject to U.S. withholding tax at a rate of 30% on the income resulting from an election to pass-through foreign tax credits to shareholders but may not be able to claim a credit or deduction with respect to the withholding tax for the foreign tax treated as having been paid by them.

*Income Effectively Connected with a U.S. Trade or Business.* If the income from the Fund is effectively connected with a U.S. trade or business carried on by a foreign shareholder, then ordinary income dividends, capital gain dividends and any gains realized upon the sale of Shares of the Fund will be subject to U.S. federal income tax at the rates applicable to U.S. citizens or domestic corporations and require the filing of a nonresident U.S. income tax return.

*Investment in U.S. real property.* The Foreign Investment in Real Property Tax Act of 1980 ("FIRPTA") makes non-U.S. persons subject to U.S. tax on disposition of a U.S. real property interest ("USRPI") as if he or she were a U.S. person. Such gain is sometimes referred to as FIRPTA gain. The Fund may invest in equity securities of corporations that invest in USRPI, including U.S. REITs, which may trigger FIRPTA gain to the Fund's non-U.S. shareholders.

The Code provides a look-through rule for distributions of FIRPTA gain when a RIC is classified as a qualified investment entity. A RIC will be classified as a qualified investment entity if, in general, 50% or more of the RIC's assets consist of interests in U.S. REITs and other U.S. real property holding corporations ("USRPHC"). If a RIC is a qualified investment entity and the non-U.S. shareholder owns more than 5% of a class of Fund Shares at any time during the one-year period ending on the date of the FIRPTA distribution, the FIRPTA distribution to the non-U.S. shareholder is treated as gain from the disposition of a USRPI, causing the distribution to be subject to U.S. withholding tax at the corporate income tax rate (unless reduced by future regulations) and requiring the non-U.S. shareholder to file a nonresident U.S. income tax return. In addition, even if the non-U.S. shareholder does not own more than 5% of a class of Fund Shares, but the Fund is a qualified investment entity, the FIRPTA distribution will be taxable as ordinary dividends (rather than as a capital gain or short-term capital gain dividend) subject to withholding at 30% or lower treaty rate.

*FIRPTA "wash sale" rule.* If the Fund is a qualified investment entity that is domestically controlled (i.e. less than 50% in value of the Fund has been owned directly or indirectly by non-U.S. shareholders during the 5-year period ending on the date of disposition) and a non-U.S. shareholder of the Fund (i) disposes of his interest in the Fund during the 30-day period preceding a FIRPTA distribution, (ii) acquires an identical stock interest during the 61-day period beginning the first day of such 30-day period preceding the FIRPTA distribution, and (iii) does not in fact receive the FIRPTA distribution in a manner that subjects the non-U.S. shareholder to tax under FIRPTA, then the non-U.S. shareholder is required to pay U.S. tax on an amount equal to the amount of the distribution that was not taxed under FIRPTA as a result of the disposition. These rules also apply to substitute dividend payments and other similar arrangements; the portion of the substitute dividend or similar payment treated as FIRPTA gain equals the portion of the RIC distribution such payment is in lieu of that otherwise would have been treated as FIRPTA gain.

*Gain on sale of Fund Shares as FIRPTA gain.* In addition, a sale or redemption of Fund Shares will be FIRPTA gain to a non-U.S. shareholder if the non-U.S. shareholder owns more than 5% of a class of Shares in the Fund and the Fund is otherwise considered a USRPHC, i.e. 50% or more of the Fund's assets consist of (1) more than 5% interests in publicly traded companies that are USRPHC, (2) interests in non-publicly traded companies that are USRPHC, and (3) interests in U.S. REITs

that are not controlled by U.S. shareholders where the REIT shares are either not publicly traded or are publicly traded and the Fund owns more than 10%.

In the unlikely event that the Fund meets the requirements described above, the gain will be taxed as income “effectively connected with a U.S. trade or business.” As a result, the non-U.S. shareholder will be required to pay U.S. income tax on such gain and file a nonresident U.S. income tax return.

Because each Fund expects to invest less than 50% of its assets at all times, directly or indirectly, in U.S. real property interests, the Fund expects that neither gain on the sale of Fund Shares nor Fund dividends and distributions would be subject to FIRPTA reporting and tax withholding.

*U.S. Estate Tax.* Transfers by gift of Shares of the Fund by a foreign shareholder who is a nonresident alien individual will not be subject to U.S. federal gift tax. An individual who, at the time of death, is a non-U.S. shareholder will nevertheless be subject to U.S. federal estate tax with respect to Fund Shares at the graduated rates applicable to U.S. citizens and residents, unless a treaty exemption applies. If a treaty exemption is available, a decedent’s estate may nonetheless need to file a U.S. estate tax return to claim the exemption in order to obtain a U.S. federal transfer certificate, which permits the decedent’s property to be transferred without federal estate tax liability. The transfer certificate will identify the property (i.e., Fund Shares) as to which the U.S. federal estate tax lien has been released. In the absence of a treaty, there is a \$13,000 statutory estate tax credit (equivalent to U.S. situs assets with a value of \$60,000). For estates with U.S. situs assets of not more than \$60,000, an affidavit from an appropriate individual that states that the decedent’s U.S. situs assets are below this threshold amount may be sufficient to transfer the Fund Shares.

*U.S. Tax Certification Rules.* Special U.S. tax certification requirements may apply to non-U.S. shareholders both to avoid U.S. backup withholding imposed at a rate of 24% and to obtain the benefits of any treaty between the United States and the shareholder’s country of residence. In general, if you are a non-U.S. shareholder, you must provide a Form W-8 BEN (or other applicable Form W-8) to establish that you are not a U.S. person, to claim that you are the beneficial owner of the income and, if applicable, to claim a reduced rate of, or exemption from, withholding as a resident of a country with which the United States has an income tax treaty. A Form W-8 BEN provided without a U.S. taxpayer identification number will remain in effect for a period beginning on the date signed and ending on the last day of the third succeeding calendar year unless an earlier change of circumstances makes the information on the form incorrect. Certain payees and payments are exempt from backup withholding.

The tax consequences to a non-U.S. shareholder entitled to claim the benefits of an applicable tax treaty may be different from those described herein. Non-U.S. shareholders are urged to consult their own tax advisors with respect to the particular tax consequences to them of an investment in the Fund, including the applicability of foreign tax.

*Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (“FATCA”).* Under FATCA, a 30% withholding tax is imposed on income dividends made by the Fund to certain foreign entities, referred to as foreign financial institutions (“FFI”) or non-financial foreign entities (“NFFE”), that fail to comply (or be deemed compliant) with extensive reporting and withholding requirements designed to inform the U.S. department of the Treasury of U.S.-owned foreign investment accounts. After December 31, 2018, FATCA withholding also would have applied to certain capital gain distributions, return of capital distributions and the proceeds arising from the sale of Shares; however, based on proposed regulations issued by the IRS, which can be relied upon currently, such withholding is no longer required unless final regulations provide otherwise (which is not expected). The FATCA withholding tax generally can be avoided: (a) by an FFI, if it reports certain direct and indirect ownership of foreign financial accounts held by U.S. persons with the FFI and (b) by an NFFE, if it: (i) certifies that it has no substantial U.S. persons as owners or (ii) if it does have such owners, reporting information relating to them. The U.S. Treasury has negotiated intergovernmental agreements (“IGA”) with certain countries and is in various stages of negotiations with a number of other foreign countries with respect to one or more alternative approaches to implement FATCA; an entity in one of those countries may be required to comply with the terms of an IGA instead of U.S. Treasury regulations.

An FFI can avoid FATCA withholding if it is deemed compliant or by becoming a “participating FFI,” which requires the FFI to enter into a U.S. tax compliance agreement with the IRS under section 1471(b) of the Code (“FFI agreement”) under which it agrees to verify, report, and disclose certain of its U.S. accountholders and meet certain other specified requirements. The FFI will either report the specified information about the U.S. accounts to the IRS, or, to the government of the FFI’s country of residence (pursuant to the terms and conditions of applicable law and an applicable IGA entered into between the United States and the FFI’s country of residence), which will, in turn, report the specified information to the IRS. An FFI that is resident in a country that has entered into an IGA with the U.S. to implement FATCA will be exempt from FATCA withholding provided that the FFI shareholder and the applicable foreign government comply with the terms of such agreement.

An NFFE that is the beneficial owner of a payment from the Fund can avoid the FATCA withholding tax generally by certifying that it does not have any substantial U.S. owners or by providing the name, address, and taxpayer identification number of each substantial U.S. owner. The NFFE will report the information to the applicable withholding agent, which will, in turn, report information to the IRS.

Such foreign shareholders also may fall into certain exempt, excepted, or deemed compliant categories as established by U.S. Treasury regulations, IGAs, and other guidance regarding FATCA. An FFI or NFFE that invests in the Fund will need to provide documentation properly certifying the entity’s status under FATCA in order to avoid FATCA withholding. Non-U.S. investors should consult their own tax advisors regarding the impact of these requirements on their investment in the Fund. The requirements imposed by FATCA are different from, and in addition to, the U.S. tax certification rules to avoid backup withholding described above. Shareholders are urged to consult their tax advisors regarding the application of these requirements to their own situation.

#### **Effect of Future Legislation; Local Tax Considerations**

The foregoing general discussion of U.S. federal income tax consequences is based on the Code and the regulations issued thereunder as in effect on the date of this SAI. Future legislative or administrative changes, including provisions of current law that sunset and thereafter no longer apply, or court decisions may significantly change the conclusions expressed herein, and any such changes or decisions may have a retroactive effect with respect to the transactions contemplated herein. Rules of state and local taxation of ordinary income, qualified dividend income and capital gain dividends may differ from the rules for U.S. federal income taxation described above. Distributions may also be subject to additional state, local and foreign taxes depending on each shareholder’s particular situation. Non-U.S. shareholders may be subject to U.S. tax rules that differ significantly from those summarized above. Shareholders are urged to consult their tax advisors as to the consequences of these and other state and local tax rules affecting investment in the Fund.

### **DIVIDENDS AND DISTRIBUTIONS**

The Fund intends to declare and distribute dividends from net investment income, if any, monthly and intends to distribute its net realized capital gains, if any, at least annually.

### **FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

The Fund’s most recent financial statements are incorporated herein by reference to the Fund’s Annual Report to Shareholders for the fiscal year ended April 30, 2024, a copy of which may be obtained without charge by calling (855) 4SS-ETFS or (855) 477-3837.

## APPENDIX 1

### INVESTMENT RATINGS

The NRSROs that may be utilized by the Fund with regard to portfolio investments for the Fund include Moody's, S&P, Fitch, and A.M. Best. Set forth below is a description of the relevant ratings of each such NRSRO. The NRSROs that may be utilized by the Fund and the description of each NRSRO's ratings is as of the date of this SAI and may subsequently change.

#### A.M. BEST

##### LONG-TERM DEBT RATINGS

###### Investment Grade

**Aaa:** Exceptional

**aa:** Very Strong

**a:** Strong

**bbb:** Adequate

###### Non-Investment Grade

**Bb:** Speculative

**b:** Very Speculative

**ccc, cc, c:** Extremely Speculative

**d:** In Default

##### SHORT-TERM DEBT RATINGS

###### Investment Grade

**AMB-1+:** Strongest

**AMB-1:** Outstanding

**AMB-2:** Satisfactory

**AMB-3:** Adequate

###### Non-Investment Grade

**AMB-4:** Speculative

**D:** In Default

#### FITCH

##### LONG-TERM DEBT RATINGS

###### Investment grade

**AAA:** the best quality companies, reliable and stable

**AA:** quality companies, a bit higher risk than AAA

**A:** economic situation can affect finance

**BBB:** medium class companies, which are satisfactory at the moment

###### Non-investment grade

**BB:** more prone to changes in the economy

**B:** financial situation varies noticeably

**CCC:** currently vulnerable and dependent on favorable economic conditions to meet its commitments

**CC:** highly vulnerable, very speculative bonds

**C:** highly vulnerable, perhaps in bankruptcy or in arrears but still continuing to pay out on obligations

**D:** has defaulted on obligations and Fitch believes that it will generally default on most or all obligations

**NR:** not publicly rated

##### SHORT-TERM DEBT RATINGS

Fitch's short-term ratings indicate the potential level of default within a 12-month period.

**F1+ :** best quality grade, indicating exceptionally strong capacity of obligor to meet its financial commitment  
**F1:** best quality grade, indicating strong capacity of obligor to meet its financial commitment  
**F2:** good quality grade with satisfactory capacity of obligor to meet its financial commitment  
**F3:** fair quality grade with adequate capacity of obligor to meet its financial commitment but near term adverse conditions could impact the obligor's commitments  
**B:** of speculative nature and obligor has minimal capacity to meet its commitment and vulnerability to short term adverse changes in financial and economic conditions  
**C:** possibility of default is high and the financial commitment of the obligor are dependent upon sustained, favorable business and economic conditions  
**D:** the obligor is in default as it has failed on its financial commitments.

Fitch also uses intermediate +/- modifiers for each category between AA and CCC (e.g., AA+, AA, AA-, A+, A, A-, BBB+, BBB, BBB-, etc.).

## MOODY'S

### GLOBAL LONG-TERM RATING SCALE

**Aaa:** Obligations rated Aaa are judged to be of the highest quality, subject to the lowest level of credit risk.  
**Aa:** Obligations rated Aa are judged to be of high quality and are subject to very low credit risk.  
**A:** Obligations rated A are judged to be upper-medium grade and are subject to low credit risk.  
**Baa:** Obligations rated Baa are judged to be medium-grade and subject to moderate credit risk and as such may possess certain speculative characteristics.  
**Ba:** Obligations rated Ba are judged to be speculative and are subject to substantial credit risk.  
**B:** Obligations rated B are considered speculative and are subject to high credit risk.  
**Caa:** Obligations rated Caa are judged to be speculative of poor standing and are subject to very high credit risk.  
**Ca:** Obligations rated Ca are highly speculative and are likely in, or very near, default, with some prospect of recovery of principal and interest.  
**C:** Obligations rated C are the lowest rated and are typically in default, with little prospect for recovery of principal or interest.

Moody's appends numerical modifiers 1, 2, and 3 to each generic rating classification from Aa through Caa. The modifier 1 indicates that the obligation ranks in the higher end of its generic rating category; the modifier 2 indicates a mid-range ranking; and the modifier 3 indicates a ranking in the lower end of that generic rating category. Additionally, a "(hyb)" indicator is appended to all ratings of hybrid securities issued by banks, insurers, finance companies, and securities firms.

Moody's differentiates structured finance ratings from fundamental ratings (i.e., ratings on nonfinancial corporate, financial institution, and public sector entities) on the global long-term scale by adding (sf) to all structured finance ratings. The (sf) indicator was introduced on August 11, 2010, and explained in a special comment entitled, "Moody's Structured Finance Rating Scale." The addition of (sf) to structured finance ratings should eliminate any presumption that such ratings and fundamental ratings at the same letter grade level will behave the same. The (sf) indicator for structured finance security ratings indicates that otherwise similarly rated structured finance and fundamental securities may have different risk characteristics.

### GLOBAL SHORT-TERM RATING SCALE

**P-1 Issuers (or supporting institutions) rated Prime-1:** have a superior ability to repay short-term debt obligations.  
**P-2 Issuers (or supporting institutions) rated Prime-2:** have a strong ability to repay short-term debt obligations.  
**P-3 Issuers (or supporting institutions) rated Prime-3:** have an acceptable ability to repay short-term obligations.  
**NP Issuers (or supporting institutions) rated Not Prime:** do not fall within any of the Prime rating categories.

### US MUNICIPAL SHORT-TERM DEBT OBLIGATION RATINGS

**MIG 1:** This designation denotes superior credit quality. Excellent protection is afforded by established cash flows, highly reliable liquidity support, or demonstrated broad-based access to the market for refinancing.

**MIG 2:** This designation denotes strong credit quality. Margins of protection are ample, although not as large as in the preceding group.

**MIG 3:** This designation denotes acceptable credit quality. Liquidity and cash-flow protection may be narrow, and market access for refinancing is likely to be less well-established. **SG** This designation denotes speculative-grade credit quality. Debt instruments in this category may lack sufficient margins of protection.

## S&P GLOBAL RATINGS (“S&P”)

**AAA:** An obligation rated 'AAA' has the highest rating assigned by Standard & Poor's. The obligor's capacity to meet its financial commitment on the obligation is extremely strong.

**AA:** An obligation rated 'AA' differs from the highest-rated obligations only to a small degree. The obligor's capacity to meet its financial commitment on the obligation is very strong.

**A:** An obligation rated 'A' is somewhat more susceptible to the adverse effects of changes in circumstances and economic conditions than obligations in higher-rated categories. However, the obligor's capacity to meet its financial commitment on the obligation is still strong.

**BBB:** An obligation rated 'BBB' exhibits adequate protection parameters. However, adverse economic conditions or changing circumstances are more likely to lead to a weakened capacity of the obligor to meet its financial commitment on the obligation.

**BB; B; CCC; CC; and C:** Obligations rated 'BB', 'B', 'CCC', 'CC', and 'C' are regarded as having significant speculative characteristics. 'BB' indicates the least degree of speculation and 'C' the highest. While such obligations will likely have some quality and protective characteristics, these may be outweighed by large uncertainties or major exposures to adverse conditions.

**BB:** An obligation rated 'BB' is less vulnerable to nonpayment than other speculative issues. However, it faces major ongoing uncertainties or exposure to adverse business, financial, or economic conditions which could lead to the obligor's inadequate capacity to meet its financial commitment on the obligation.

**B:** An obligation rated 'B' is more vulnerable to nonpayment than obligations rated 'BB', but the obligor currently has the capacity to meet its financial commitment on the obligation. Adverse business, financial, or economic conditions will likely impair the obligor's capacity or willingness to meet its financial commitment on the obligation.

**CCC:** An obligation rated 'CCC' is currently vulnerable to nonpayment, and is dependent upon favorable business, financial, and economic conditions for the obligor to meet its financial commitment on the obligation. In the event of adverse business, financial, or economic conditions, the obligor is not likely to have the capacity to meet its financial commitment on the obligation.

**CC** An obligation rated 'CC' is currently highly vulnerable to nonpayment.

**C:** A 'C' rating is assigned to obligations that are currently highly vulnerable to nonpayment, obligations that have payment arrearages allowed by the terms of the documents, or obligations of an issuer that is the subject of a bankruptcy petition or similar action which have not experienced a payment default. Among others, the 'C' rating may be assigned to subordinated debt, preferred stock or other obligations on which cash payments have been suspended in accordance with the instrument's terms or when preferred stock is the subject of a distressed exchange offer, whereby some or all of the issue is either repurchased for an amount of cash or replaced by other instruments having a total value that is less than par.

**D:** An obligation rated 'D' is in payment default. The 'D' rating category is used when payments on an obligation are not made on the date due, unless S&P believes that such payments will be made within five business days, irrespective of any grace period. The 'D' rating also will be used upon the filing of a bankruptcy petition or the taking of similar action if payments on an obligation are jeopardized. An obligation's rating is lowered to 'D' upon completion of a distressed exchange offer, whereby some or all of the issue is either repurchased for an amount of cash or replaced by other instruments having a total value that is less than par.

**NR:** This indicates that no rating has been requested, that there is insufficient information on which to base a rating, or that S&P does not rate a particular obligation as a matter of policy.

\*The ratings from 'AA' to 'CCC' may be modified by the addition of a plus (+) or minus (-) sign to show relative standing within the major rating categories.

## APPENDIX 2

### RATIONAL ADVISORS, INC.

#### PROXY VOTING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Pursuant to the recent adoption by the Securities and Exchange Commission (the “Commission”) of Rule 206(4)-6 (17 CFR 275.206(4)-6) and amendments to Rule 204-2 (17 CFR 275.204-2) under the Investment Advisors Act of 1940 (the “Act”), it is a fraudulent, deceptive, or manipulative act, practice or course of business, within the meaning of Section 206(4) of the Act, for an investment advisor to exercise voting authority with respect to client securities, unless (i) the advisor has adopted and implemented written policies and procedures that are reasonably designed to ensure that the advisor votes proxies in the best interests of its clients, (ii) the advisor describes its proxy voting procedures to its clients and provides copies on request, and (iii) the advisor discloses to clients how they may obtain information on how the advisor voted their proxies.

Day-to-day administration of proxy voting may be provided internally or by a third-party service provider, depending on client type, subject to the ultimate oversight of the Advisor. The Advisor shall supervise the relationships with its proxy voting services, ISS. ISS apprises the Advisor of shareholder meeting dates and casts the actual proxy votes. ISS also provides research on proxy proposals and voting recommendations. ISS serves as the Advisor’s proxy voting record keepers and generate reports on how proxies were voted. The Advisor periodically reviews communications from ISS to determine whether ISS voted the correct amount of proxies, whether the votes were cast in a timely manner, and whether the vote was in accordance with the Policies or the Advisor’s specific instructions.

In order to fulfill its responsibilities under the Act, Rational Advisors, Inc. (hereinafter “we” or “our”) has adopted the following policies and procedures for proxy voting with regard to companies in investment portfolios of our clients.

#### **KEY OBJECTIVES**

The key objectives of these policies and procedures recognize that a company’s management is entrusted with the day-to-day operations and longer-term strategic planning of the company, subject to the oversight of the company’s board of directors. While “ordinary business matters” are primarily the responsibility of management and should be approved solely by the corporation’s board of directors, these objectives also recognize that the company’s shareholders must have final say over how management and directors are performing, and how shareholders’ rights and ownership interests are handled, especially when matters could have substantial economic implications to the shareholders.

Therefore, we will pay particular attention to the following matters in exercising our proxy voting responsibilities as a fiduciary for our clients:

*Accountability.* Each company should have effective means in place to hold those entrusted with running a company’s business accountable for their actions. Management of a company should be accountable to its board of directors and the board should be accountable to shareholders.

*Alignment of Management and Shareholder Interests.* Each company should endeavor to align the interests of management and the board of directors with the interests of the company’s shareholders. For example, we generally believe that compensation should be designed to reward management for doing a good job of creating value for the shareholders of the company.

*Transparency.* Promotion of timely disclosure of important information about a company’s business operations and financial performance enables investors to evaluate the performance of a company and to make informed decisions about the purchase and sale of a company’s securities.



*Climate Change:*

**Say on Climate (SoC) Management Proposals:** Vote case-by-case on management proposals that request shareholders to approve the company's climate transition action plan, taking into account the completeness and rigor of the plan. Information that will be considered where available includes the following:

- The extent to which the company's climate related disclosures are in line with TCFD recommendations and meet other market standards;
- Disclosure of its operational and supply chain GHG emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3);
- The completeness and rigor of company's short-, medium-, and long-term targets for reducing operational and supply chain GHG emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3 if relevant);
- Whether the company has sought and received third-party approval that its targets are science-based;
- Whether the company has made a commitment to be "net zero" for operational and supply chain emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3) by 2050;
- Whether the company discloses a commitment to report on the implementation of its plan in subsequent years;
- Whether the company's climate data has received third-party assurance;
- Disclosure of how the company's lobbying activities and its capital expenditures align with company strategy;
- Whether there are specific industry decarbonization challenges; and
- The company's related commitment, disclosure, and performance compared to its industry peers.

**Say on Climate (SoC) Shareholder Proposals:** Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals that request the company to disclose a report providing its GHG emissions levels and reduction targets and/or its upcoming/approved climate transition action plan and provide shareholders the opportunity to express approval or disapproval of its GHG emissions reduction plan. taking into account information such as the following:

- The completeness and rigor of the company's climate-related disclosure;
- The company's actual GHG emissions performance;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent, significant violations, fines, litigation, or controversy related to its GHG emissions; and
- Whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive.

**Climate Change/Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions:** Generally, vote for resolutions requesting that a company disclose information on the financial, physical, or regulatory risks it faces related to climate change on its operations and investments or on how the company identifies, measures, and manages such risks, considering:

- Whether the company already provides current, publicly available information on the impact that climate change may have on the company as well as associated company policies and procedures to address related risks and/or opportunities; ▪
- The company's level of disclosure compared to industry peers; and ▪
- Whether there are significant controversies, fines, penalties, or litigation associated with the company's climate change-related performance.

Generally, vote for proposals requesting a report on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from company operations and/or products and operations, unless:

- The company already discloses current, publicly available information on the impacts that GHG emissions may have on the company as well as associated company policies and procedures to address related risks and/or opportunities; ▪ The company's level of disclosure is comparable to that of industry peers; and ▪
- There are no significant controversies, fines, penalties, or litigation associated with the company's GHG emissions.

Vote case-by-case on proposals that call for the adoption of GHG reduction goals from products and operations, taking into account:

- Whether the company provides disclosure of year-over-year GHG emissions performance data;
- Whether company disclosure lags behind industry peers;

- The company's actual GHG emissions performance
- The company's current GHG emission policies, oversight mechanisms, and related initiatives; and
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent, significant violations, fines, litigation, or controversy related to GHG emissions.

**Energy Efficiency:** Generally, vote for proposals requesting that a company report on its energy efficiency policies, unless:

- The company complies with applicable energy efficiency regulations and laws, and discloses its participation in energy efficiency policies and programs, including disclosure of benchmark data, targets, and performance measures; or
- The proponent requests adoption of specific energy efficiency goals within specific timelines.

**Renewable Energy:** Generally, vote for requests for reports on the feasibility of developing renewable energy resources unless the report would be duplicative of existing disclosure or irrelevant to the company's line of business.

Generally, vote against proposals requesting that the company invest in renewable energy resources. Such decisions are best left to management's evaluation of the feasibility and financial impact that such programs may have on the company.

Generally, vote against proposals that call for the adoption of renewable energy goals, taking into account:

- The scope and structure of the proposal;
- The company's current level of disclosure on renewable energy use and GHG emissions; and
- The company's disclosure of policies, practices, and oversight implemented to manage GHG emissions and mitigate climate change risks.

## **DECISION METHODS**

No set of proxy voting guidelines can anticipate all situations that may arise. In special cases, we may seek insight from our managers and analysts on how a particular proxy proposal may impact the financial prospects of a company and vote accordingly.

We believe that we invest in companies with strong management. Therefore, we will tend to vote proxies consistent with management's recommendations. However, we will vote contrary to management's recommendations if we believe those recommendations are not consistent with increasing shareholder value.

## **SUMMARY OF PROXY VOTING GUIDELINES**

### **Election of the Board of Directors**

We believe that good corporate governance generally starts with a board composed primarily of independent directors, unfettered by significant ties to management, all of whose members are elected annually. We also believe that turnover in board composition promotes independent board action, fresh approaches to governance, and generally has a positive impact on shareholder value. We will generally vote in favor of non-incumbent independent directors.

The election of a company's board of directors is one of the most fundamental rights held by shareholders. Because a classified board structure prevents shareholders from electing a full slate of directors annually, we will generally support efforts to declassify boards or other measures that permit shareholders to remove a majority of directors at any time and will generally oppose efforts to adopt classified board structures.

### **Approval of Independent Auditors**

We believe that the relationship between a company and its auditors should be limited primarily to the audit engagement, although it may include certain closely related activities that do not raise an appearance of impaired independence.

We will evaluate on a case-by-case basis instances in which the audit firm has a substantial non-audit relationship with a company to determine whether we believe independence has been, or could be, compromised.

#### **Equity-based compensation plans**

We believe that appropriately designed equity-based compensation plans, approved by shareholders, can be an effective way to align the interests of shareholders and the interests of directors, management, and employees by providing incentives to increase shareholder value. Conversely, we are opposed to plans that substantially dilute ownership interests in the company, provide participants with excessive awards, or have inherently objectionable structural features.

We will generally support measures intended to increase stock ownership by executives and the use of employee stock purchase plans to increase company stock ownership by employees. These may include:

1. Requiring senior executives to hold stock in a company.
2. Requiring stock acquired through option exercise to be held for a certain period of time.

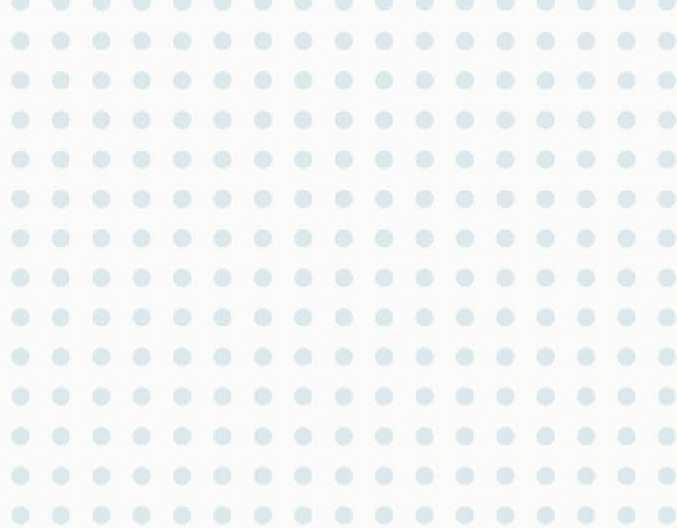
These are guidelines, and we consider other factors, such as the nature of the industry and size of the company, when assessing a plan's impact on ownership interests.

#### **Corporate Structure**

We view the exercise of shareholders' rights, including the right to act by written consent, to call special meetings and to remove directors, to be fundamental to good corporate governance.

Because classes of common stock with unequal voting rights limit the rights of certain shareholders, we generally believe that shareholders should have voting power equal to their equity interest in the company and should be able to approve or reject changes to a company's by-laws by a simple majority vote.

We will generally support the ability of shareholders to cumulate their votes for the election of directors.



# UNITED STATES

## Proxy Voting Guidelines Benchmark Policy Recommendations

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Effective for Meetings on or after February 1, 2022  
Published December 13, 2021



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## Coverage

The U.S. research team provides proxy analyses and voting recommendations for the common shareholder meetings of U.S. - incorporated companies that are publicly-traded on U.S. exchanges, as well as certain OTC companies, if they are held in our institutional investor clients' portfolios. Coverage generally includes corporate actions for common equity holders, such as written consents and bankruptcies. ISS' U.S. coverage includes investment companies (including open-end funds, closed-end funds, exchange-traded funds, and unit investment trusts), limited partnerships ("LPs"), master limited partnerships ("MLPs"), limited liability companies ("LLCs"), and business development companies. ISS reviews its universe of coverage on an annual basis, and the coverage is subject to change based on client need and industry trends.

### Foreign-incorporated companies

In addition to U.S.- incorporated, U.S.- listed companies, ISS' U.S. policies are applied to certain foreign-incorporated company analyses. Like the SEC, ISS distinguishes two types of companies that list but are not incorporated in the U.S.:

- U.S. Domestic Issuers – which have a majority of outstanding shares held in the U.S. and meet other criteria, as determined by the SEC, and are subject to the same disclosure and listing standards as U.S. incorporated companies (e.g. they are required to file DEF14A proxy statements) – are generally covered under standard U.S. policy guidelines.
- [Foreign Private Issuers](#) (FPIs) – which are allowed to take exemptions from most disclosure requirements (e.g., they are allowed to file 6-K for their proxy materials) and U.S. listing standards – are generally covered under a combination of policy guidelines:
  - FPI Guidelines (see the [Americas Regional Proxy Voting Guidelines](#)), may apply to companies incorporated in governance havens, and apply certain minimum independence and disclosure standards in the evaluation of key proxy ballot items, such as the election of directors; and/or
  - Guidelines for the market that is responsible for, or most relevant to, the item on the ballot.

U.S. incorporated companies listed only on non-U.S. exchanges are generally covered under the ISS guidelines for the market on which they are traded.

An FPI is generally covered under ISS' approach to FPIs outlined above, even if such FPI voluntarily files a proxy statement and/or other filing normally required of a U.S. Domestic Issuer, so long as the company retains its FPI status.

In all cases – including with respect to other companies with cross-market features that may lead to ballot items related to multiple markets – items that are on the ballot solely due to the requirements of another market (listing, incorporation, or national code) may be evaluated under the policy of the relevant market, regardless of the "assigned" primary market coverage.

## 5. Board of Directors

### Voting on Director Nominees in Uncontested Elections


Four fundamental principles apply when determining votes on director nominees:

**Independence:** Boards should be sufficiently independent from management (and significant shareholders) to ensure that they are able and motivated to effectively supervise management's performance for the benefit of all shareholders, including in setting and monitoring the execution of corporate strategy, with appropriate use of shareholder capital, and in setting and monitoring executive compensation programs that support that strategy. The chair of the board should ideally be an independent director, and all boards should have an independent leadership position or a similar role in order to help provide appropriate counterbalance to executive management, as well as having sufficiently independent committees that focus on key governance concerns such as audit, compensation, and nomination of directors.

**Composition:** Companies should ensure that directors add value to the board through their specific skills and expertise and by having sufficient time and commitment to serve effectively. Boards should be of a size appropriate to accommodate diversity, expertise, and independence, while ensuring active and collaborative participation by all members. Boards should be sufficiently diverse to ensure consideration of a wide range of perspectives.

**Responsiveness:** Directors should respond to investor input, such as that expressed through significant opposition to management proposals, significant support for shareholder proposals (whether binding or non-binding), and tender offers where a majority of shares are tendered.

**Accountability:** Boards should be sufficiently accountable to shareholders, including through transparency of the company's governance practices and regular board elections, by the provision of sufficient information for shareholders to be able to assess directors and board composition, and through the ability of shareholders to remove directors.

 **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for director nominees, except under the following circumstances (with new nominees<sup>1</sup> considered on case-by-case basis):

#### Independence

Vote against<sup>2</sup> or withhold from non-independent directors (Executive Directors and Non-Independent Non-Executive Directors per [ISS' Classification of Directors](#)) when:

- Independent directors comprise 50 percent or less of the board;
- The non-independent director serves on the audit, compensation, or nominating committee;
- The company lacks an audit, compensation, or nominating committee so that the full board functions as that committee; or
- The company lacks a formal nominating committee, even if the board attests that the independent directors fulfill the functions of such a committee.

<sup>1</sup> A "new nominee" is a director who is being presented for election by shareholders for the first time. Recommendations on new nominees who have served for less than one year are made on a case-by-case basis depending on the timing of their appointment and the problematic governance issue in question.

<sup>2</sup> In general, companies with a plurality vote standard use "Withhold" as the contrary vote option in director elections; companies with a majority vote standard use "Against". However, it will vary by company and the proxy must be checked to determine the valid contrary vote option for the particular company.

**ISS Classification of Directors – U.S.**

- **Executive Director**
  - Current officer<sup>1</sup> of the company or one of its affiliates<sup>2</sup>.
- **Non-Independent Non-Executive Director**
  - Board Identification
  - Director identified as not independent by the board.
  - Controlling/Significant Shareholder
    - Beneficial owner of more than 50 percent of the company's voting power (this may be aggregated if voting power is distributed among more than one member of a group).
  - Current Employment at Company or Related Company
    - Non-officer employee of the firm (including employee representatives).
    - Officer<sup>1</sup>, former officer, or general or limited partner of a joint venture or partnership with the company.
  - Former Employment
    - Former CEO of the company.<sup>3, 4</sup>
    - Former non-CEO officer<sup>1</sup> of the company or an affiliate<sup>2</sup> within the past five years.
    - Former officer<sup>1</sup> of an acquired company within the past five years.<sup>4</sup>
    - Officer<sup>1</sup> of a former parent or predecessor firm at the time the company was sold or split off within the past five years.
    - Former interim officer if the service was longer than 18 months. If the service was between 12 and 18 months an assessment of the interim officer's employment agreement will be made.<sup>5</sup>
  - Family Members
    - Immediate family member<sup>6</sup> of a current or former officer<sup>1</sup> of the company or its affiliates<sup>2</sup> within the last five years.
    - Immediate family member<sup>6</sup> of a current employee of company or its affiliates<sup>2</sup> where additional factors raise concern (which may include, but are not limited to, the following: a director related to numerous employees; the company or its affiliates employ relatives of numerous board members; or a non-Section 16 officer in a key strategic role).
  - Professional, Transactional, and Charitable Relationships
    - Director who (or whose immediate family member<sup>6</sup>) currently provides professional services<sup>7</sup> in excess of \$10,000 per year to: the company, an affiliate<sup>2</sup>, or an individual officer of the company or an affiliate; or who is (or whose immediate family member<sup>6</sup> is) a partner, employee, or controlling shareholder of an organization which provides the services.
    - Director who (or whose immediate family member<sup>6</sup>) currently has any material transactional relationship<sup>8</sup> with the company or its affiliates<sup>2</sup>; or who is (or whose immediate family member<sup>6</sup> is) a partner in, or a controlling shareholder or an executive officer of, an organization which has the material transactional relationship<sup>8</sup> (excluding investments in the company through a private placement).
    - Director who (or whose immediate family member<sup>6</sup>) is a trustee, director, or employee of a charitable or non-profit organization that receives material grants or endowments<sup>8</sup> from the company or its affiliates<sup>2</sup>.
  - Other Relationships
    - Party to a voting agreement<sup>9</sup> to vote in line with management on proposals being brought to shareholder vote.
    - Has (or an immediate family member<sup>6</sup> has) an interlocking relationship as defined by the SEC involving members of the board of directors or its Compensation Committee.<sup>10</sup>
    - Founder<sup>11</sup> of the company but not currently an employee.
    - Director with pay comparable to Named Executive Officers.
    - Any material<sup>12</sup> relationship with the company.
  - **Independent Director**
    - No material<sup>12</sup> connection to the company other than a board seat.

**Footnotes:**

- The definition of officer will generally follow that of a “Section 16 officer” (officers subject to Section 16 of the Securities and Exchange Act of 1934) and includes the chief executive, operating, financial, legal, technology, and accounting officers of a company (including the president, treasurer, secretary, controller, or any vice president in charge of a principal business unit, division, or policy function). Current interim officers are included in this category. For private companies, the equivalent positions are applicable. A non-employee director serving as an officer due to statutory requirements (e.g. corporate secretary) will generally be classified as a Non-Independent Non-Executive Director under “Any material relationship with the company.” However, if the company provides explicit disclosure that the director is not receiving additional compensation exceeding \$10,000 per year for serving in that capacity, then the director will be classified as an Independent Director.
- “Affiliate” includes a subsidiary, sibling company, or parent company. ISS uses 50 percent control ownership by the parent company as the standard for applying its affiliate designation. The manager/advisor of an externally managed issuer (EMI) is considered an affiliate.
  - Includes any former CEO of the company prior to the company’s initial public offering (IPO).
- When there is a former CEO of a special purpose acquisition company (SPAC) serving on the board of an acquired company, ISS will generally classify such directors as independent unless determined otherwise taking into account the following factors: the applicable listing standards determination of such director’s independence; any operating ties to the firm; and the existence of any other conflicting relationships or related party transactions.
- ISS will look at the terms of the interim officer’s employment contract to determine if it contains severance pay, long-term health and pension benefits, or other such standard provisions typically contained in contracts of permanent, non-temporary CEOs. ISS will also consider if a formal search process was under way for a full-time officer at the time.
- “Immediate family member” follows the SEC’s definition of such and covers spouses, parents, children, step-parents, step-children, siblings, in-laws, and any person (other than a tenant or employee) sharing the household of any director, nominee for director, executive officer, or significant shareholder of the company.
- Professional services can be characterized as advisory in nature, generally involve access to sensitive company information or to strategic decision-making, and typically have a commission- or fee-based payment structure. Professional services generally include but are not limited to the following: investment banking/financial advisory services, commercial banking (beyond deposit services), investment services, insurance services, accounting/audit services, consulting services, marketing services, legal services, property management services, realtor services, lobbying services, executive search services, and IT consulting services. The following would generally be considered transactional relationships and not professional services: deposit services, IT tech support services, educational services, and construction services. The case of participation in a banking syndicate by a non-lead bank should be considered a transactional (and hence subject to the associated materiality test) rather than a professional relationship. “Of Counsel” relationships are only considered immaterial if the individual does not receive any form of compensation (in excess of \$10,000 per year) from, or is a retired partner of, the firm providing the professional service. The case of a company providing a professional service to one of its directors or to an entity with which one of its directors is affiliated, will be considered a transactional rather than a professional relationship. Insurance services and marketing services are assumed to be professional services unless the company explains why such services are not advisory.
- A material transactional relationship, including grants to non-profit organizations, exists if the company makes annual payments to, or receives annual payments from, another entity, exceeding the greater of: \$200,000 or 5 percent of the recipient’s gross revenues, for a company that follows NASDAQ listing standards; or the greater of \$1,000,000 or 2 percent of the recipient’s gross revenues, for a company that follows NYSE listing standards. For a company that follows neither of the preceding standards, ISS will apply the NASDAQ-based materiality test. (The recipient is the party receiving the financial proceeds from the transaction).
- Dissident directors who are parties to a voting agreement pursuant to a settlement or similar arrangement may be classified as Independent Directors if an analysis of the following factors indicates that the voting agreement does not compromise their alignment with all shareholders’ interests: the terms of the agreement; the duration of the standstill provision in the agreement; the limitations and requirements of actions that are agreed upon; if the dissident director nominee(s) is subject to the standstill; and if there any conflicting relationships or related party transactions.
- Interlocks include: executive officers serving as directors on each other’s compensation or similar committees (or, in the absence of such a committee, on the board); or executive officers sitting on each other’s boards and at least one serves on the other’s compensation or similar committees (or, in the absence of such a committee, on the board).

11. The operating involvement of the founder with the company will be considered; if the founder was never employed by the company, ISS may deem him or her an Independent Director.

12. For purposes of ISS's director independence classification, "material" will be defined as a standard of relationship (financial, personal, or otherwise) that a reasonable person might conclude could potentially influence one's objectivity in the boardroom in a manner that would have a meaningful impact on an individual's ability to satisfy requisite fiduciary standards on behalf of shareholders.

## **Composition**

**Attendance at Board and Committee Meetings:** Generally vote against or withhold from directors (except nominees who served only part of the fiscal year<sup>3</sup>) who attend less than 75 percent of the aggregate of their board and committee meetings for the period for which they served, unless an acceptable reason for absences is disclosed in the proxy or another SEC filing. Acceptable reasons for director absences are generally limited to the following:

- Medical issues/illness;
- Family emergencies; and
- Missing only one meeting (when the total of all meetings is three or fewer).

In cases of chronic poor attendance without reasonable justification, in addition to voting against the director(s) with poor attendance, generally vote against or withhold from appropriate members of the nominating/governance committees or the full board.

If the proxy disclosure is unclear and insufficient to determine whether a director attended at least 75 percent of the aggregate of his/her board and committee meetings during his/her period of service, vote against or withhold from the director(s) in question.

**Overboarded Directors:** Generally vote against or withhold from individual directors who:

- Sit on more than five public company boards; or
- Are CEOs of public companies who sit on the boards of more than two public companies besides their own— withhold only at their outside boards<sup>4</sup>.

**Gender Diversity:** For companies in the Russell 3000 or S&P 1500 indices, generally vote against or withhold from the chair of the nominating committee (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) at companies where there are no women on the company's board. An exception will be made if there was a woman on the board at the preceding annual meeting and the board makes a firm commitment to return to a gender-diverse status within a year.

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<sup>3</sup> Nominees who served for only part of the fiscal year are generally exempted from the attendance policy.

<sup>4</sup> Although all of a CEO's subsidiary boards with publicly-traded common stock will be counted as separate boards, ISS will not recommend a withhold vote for the CEO of a parent company board or any of the controlled (>50 percent ownership) subsidiaries of that parent but may do so at subsidiaries that are less than 50 percent controlled and boards outside the parent/subsidiary relationships.

This policy will also apply for companies not in the Russell 3000 and S&P1500 indices, effective for meetings on or after **Feb. 1, 2023**.

**Racial and/or Ethnic Diversity:** For companies in the Russell 3000 or S&P 1500 indices, generally vote against or withhold from the chair of the nominating committee (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) where the board has no apparent racially or ethnically diverse members<sup>5</sup>. An exception will be made if there was racial and/or ethnic diversity on the board at the preceding annual meeting and the board makes a firm commitment to appoint at least one racial and/or ethnic diverse member within a year.

### Responsiveness

Vote case-by-case on individual directors, committee members, or the entire board of directors as appropriate if:

- The board failed to act on a shareholder proposal that received the support of a majority of the shares cast in the previous year or failed to act on a management proposal seeking to ratify an existing charter/bylaw provision that received opposition of a majority of the shares cast in the previous year. Factors that will be considered are:
  - Disclosed outreach efforts by the board to shareholders in the wake of the vote;
  - Rationale provided in the proxy statement for the level of implementation;
  - The subject matter of the proposal;
  - The level of support for and opposition to the resolution in past meetings;
  - Actions taken by the board in response to the majority vote and its engagement with shareholders;
  - The continuation of the underlying issue as a voting item on the ballot (as either shareholder or management proposals); and
  - Other factors as appropriate.
- The board failed to act on takeover offers where the majority of shares are tendered;
- At the previous board election, any director received more than 50 percent withhold/against votes of the shares cast and the company has failed to address the issue(s) that caused the high withhold/against vote.

Vote case-by-case on Compensation Committee members (or, in exceptional cases, the full board) and the Say on Pay proposal if:

- The company's previous say-on-pay received the support of less than 70 percent of votes cast. Factors that will be considered are:
  - The company's response, including:
    - Disclosure of engagement efforts with major institutional investors, including the frequency and timing of engagements and the company participants (including whether independent directors participated);
    - Disclosure of the specific concerns voiced by dissenting shareholders that led to the say-on-pay opposition;
    - Disclosure of specific and meaningful actions taken to address shareholders' concerns;
  - Other recent compensation actions taken by the company;
  - Whether the issues raised are recurring or isolated;
  - The company's ownership structure; and
  - Whether the support level was less than 50 percent, which would warrant the highest degree of responsiveness.

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<sup>5</sup> Aggregate diversity statistics provided by the board will only be considered if specific to racial and/or ethnic diversity.

- The board implements an advisory vote on executive compensation on a less frequent basis than the frequency that received the plurality of votes cast.

### Accountability

#### *Problematic Takeover Defenses/Governance Structure*

**Poison Pills:** Vote against or withhold from all nominees (except new nominees<sup>1</sup>, who should be considered case-by-case) if:

- The company has a poison pill that was not approved by shareholders<sup>6</sup>. However, vote case-by-case on nominees if the board adopts an initial pill with a term of one year or less, depending on the disclosed rationale for the adoption, and other factors as relevant (such as a commitment to put any renewal to a shareholder vote);
- The board makes a material adverse modification to an existing pill, including, but not limited to, extension, renewal, or lowering the trigger, without shareholder approval; or
- The pill, whether short-term<sup>7</sup> or long-term, has a deadhand or slowhand feature.

**Classified Board Structure:** The board is classified, and a continuing director responsible for a problematic governance issue at the board/committee level that would warrant a withhold/against vote recommendation is not up for election. All appropriate nominees (except new) may be held accountable.

**Removal of Shareholder Discretion on Classified Boards:** The company has opted into, or failed to opt out of, state laws requiring a classified board structure.

**Director Performance Evaluation:** The board lacks mechanisms to promote accountability and oversight, coupled with sustained poor performance relative to peers. Sustained poor performance is measured by one-, three-, and five-year total shareholder returns in the bottom half of a company's four-digit GICS industry group (Russell 3000 companies only). Take into consideration the company's operational metrics and other factors as warranted. Problematic provisions include but are not limited to:

- A classified board structure;
- A supermajority vote requirement;
- Either a plurality vote standard in uncontested director elections, or a majority vote standard in contested elections;
- The inability of shareholders to call special meetings;
- The inability of shareholders to act by written consent;
- A multi-class capital structure; and/or
- A non-shareholder-approved poison pill.

**Unilateral Bylaw/Charter Amendments and Problematic Capital Structures:** Generally vote against or withhold from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees<sup>1</sup>, who should be considered case-by-case) if the board amends the company's bylaws or charter without shareholder approval in a manner that materially diminishes shareholders' rights or that could adversely impact shareholders, considering the following factors:

- The board's rationale for adopting the bylaw/charter amendment without shareholder ratification;
- Disclosure by the company of any significant engagement with shareholders regarding the amendment;



PROXY VOTING GUIDELINES

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<sup>6</sup> Public shareholders only, approval prior to a company's becoming public is insufficient.

<sup>7</sup> If the short-term pill with a deadhand or slowhand feature is enacted but expires before the next shareholder vote, ISS will generally still recommend withhold/against nominees at the next shareholder meeting following its adoption.

- The level of impairment of shareholders' rights caused by the board's unilateral amendment to the bylaws/charter;
- The board's track record with regard to unilateral board action on bylaw/charter amendments or other entrenchment provisions;
- The company's ownership structure;
- The company's existing governance provisions;
- The timing of the board's amendment to the bylaws/charter in connection with a significant business development; and
- Other factors, as deemed appropriate, that may be relevant to determine the impact of the amendment on shareholders.

Unless the adverse amendment is reversed or submitted to a binding shareholder vote, in subsequent years vote case-by-case on director nominees. Generally vote against (except new nominees<sup>1</sup>, who should be considered case-by-case) if the directors:

- Classified the board;
- Adopted supermajority vote requirements to amend the bylaws or charter; or
- Eliminated shareholders' ability to amend bylaws.

## Unequal Voting Rights

**Problematic Capital Structure - Newly Public Companies:** For 2022, for newly public companies<sup>8</sup>, generally vote against or withhold from the entire board (except new nominees<sup>1</sup>, who should be considered case-by-case) if, prior to or in connection with the company's public offering, the company or its board implemented a multi-class capital structure in which the classes have unequal voting rights without subjecting the multi-class capital structure to a reasonable time-based sunset. In assessing the reasonableness of a time-based sunset provision,

consideration will be given to the company's lifespan, its post-IPO ownership structure and the board's disclosed rationale for the sunset period selected. No sunset period of more than seven years from the date of the IPO will be considered to be reasonable.

Continue to vote against or withhold from incumbent directors in subsequent years, unless the problematic capital structure is reversed, removed, or subject to a newly added reasonable sunset.

**Common Stock Capital Structure with Unequal Voting Rights:** Starting Feb 1, 2023, generally vote withhold or against directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees<sup>1</sup>, who should be considered case-by-case), if the company employs a common stock structure with unequal voting rights<sup>9</sup>.

Exceptions to this policy will generally be limited to:

- Newly-public companies<sup>8</sup> with a sunset provision of no more than seven years from the date of going public;
- Limited Partnerships and the Operating Partnership (OP) unit structure of REITs;
- Situations where the unequal voting rights are considered *de minimis*; or
- The company provides sufficient protections for minority shareholders, such as allowing minority shareholders a regular binding vote on whether the capital structure should be maintained.

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<sup>8</sup> Newly-public companies generally include companies that emerge from bankruptcy, SPAC transactions, spin-offs, direct

listings, and those who complete a traditional initial public offering.

<sup>9</sup>This generally includes classes of common stock that have additional votes per share than other shares; classes of shares that are not entitled to vote on all the same ballot items or nominees; or stock with time-phased voting rights (“loyalty shares”).

**Problematic Governance Structure - Newly Public Companies:** For newly public companies<sup>8</sup>, generally vote against or withhold from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees<sup>1</sup>, who should be considered case-by-case) if, prior to or in connection with the company's public offering, the company or its board adopted the following bylaw or charter provisions that are considered to be materially adverse to shareholder rights:

- Supermajority vote requirements to amend the bylaws or charter;
- A classified board structure; or
- Other egregious provisions.

A reasonable sunset provision will be considered a mitigating factor.

Unless the adverse provision is reversed or removed, vote case-by-case on director nominees in subsequent years.

**Management Proposals to Ratify Existing Charter or Bylaw Provisions:** Vote against/withhold from individual directors, members of the governance committee, or the full board, where boards ask shareholders to ratify existing charter or bylaw provisions considering the following factors:

- The presence of a shareholder proposal addressing the same issue on the same ballot;
- The board's rationale for seeking ratification;
- Disclosure of actions to be taken by the board should the ratification proposal fail;
- Disclosure of shareholder engagement regarding the board's ratification request;
- The level of impairment to shareholders' rights caused by the existing provision;
- The history of management and shareholder proposals on the provision at the company's past meetings;
- Whether the current provision was adopted in response to the shareholder proposal;
- The company's ownership structure; and
- Previous use of ratification proposals to exclude shareholder proposals.

### *Restrictions on Shareholders' Rights*

**Restricting Binding Shareholder Proposals:** Generally vote against or withhold from the members of the governance committee if:

- The company's governing documents impose undue restrictions on shareholders' ability to amend the bylaws. Such restrictions include but are not limited to: outright prohibition on the submission of binding shareholder proposals or share ownership requirements, subject matter restrictions, or time holding requirements in excess of SEC Rule 14a-8. Vote against or withhold on an ongoing basis.

Submission of management proposals to approve or ratify requirements in excess of SEC Rule 14a-8 for the submission of binding bylaw amendments will generally be viewed as an insufficient restoration of shareholders' rights. Generally continue to vote against or withhold on an ongoing basis until shareholders are provided with an unfettered ability to amend the bylaws or a proposal providing for such unfettered right is submitted for shareholder approval.

### **Problematic Audit-Related Practices**

Generally vote against or withhold from the members of the Audit Committee if:

- The non-audit fees paid to the auditor are [excessive](#);
- The company receives an adverse opinion on the company's financial statements from its auditor; or
- There is persuasive evidence that the Audit Committee entered into an inappropriate indemnification

agreement with its auditor that limits the ability of the company, or its shareholders, to pursue legitimate legal recourse against the audit firm.

Vote case-by-case on members of the Audit Committee and potentially the full board if:

- Poor accounting practices are identified that rise to a level of serious concern, such as: fraud; misapplication of GAAP; and material weaknesses identified in Section 404 disclosures. Examine the severity, breadth, chronological sequence, and duration, as well as the company's efforts at remediation or corrective actions, in determining whether withhold/against votes are warranted.

### **Problematic Compensation Practices**

In the absence of an Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation (Say on Pay) ballot item or in egregious situations, vote against or withhold from the members of the Compensation Committee and potentially the full board if:

- There is an unmitigated misalignment between CEO pay and company performance ([pay for performance](#));
- The company maintains significant [problematic pay practices](#); or
- The board exhibits a significant level of [poor communication and responsiveness](#) to shareholders.

Generally vote against or withhold from the Compensation Committee chair, other committee members, or potentially the full board if:

- The company fails to include a Say on Pay ballot item when required under SEC provisions, or under the company's declared frequency of say on pay; or
- The company fails to include a Frequency of Say on Pay ballot item when required under SEC provisions.

Generally vote against members of the board committee responsible for approving/setting non-employee director compensation if there is a pattern (i.e. two or more years) of awarding excessive non-employee director compensation without disclosing a compelling rationale or other mitigating factors.

### **Problematic Pledging of Company Stock:**

Vote against the members of the committee that oversees risks related to pledging, or the full board, where a significant level of pledged company stock by executives or directors raises concerns. The following factors will be considered:

- The presence of an anti-pledging policy, disclosed in the proxy statement, that prohibits future pledging activity;
- The magnitude of aggregate pledged shares in terms of total common shares outstanding, market value, and trading volume;
- Disclosure of progress or lack thereof in reducing the magnitude of aggregate pledged shares over time;
- Disclosure in the proxy statement that shares subject to stock ownership and holding requirements do not include pledged company stock; and
- Any other relevant factors.

### **Climate Accountability**

For companies that are significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters, through their operations or value chain<sup>10</sup>, generally vote against or withhold from the incumbent chair of the responsible committee (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) in cases where ISS determines that the company is not taking the minimum steps needed to understand, assess, and mitigate risks related to climate change to the company and the larger economy.

<sup>10</sup> For 2022, companies defined as “significant GHG emitters” will be those on the current Climate Action 100+ Focus Group list.

For **2022**, minimum steps to understand and mitigate those risks are considered to be the following. Both minimum criteria will be required to be in compliance:

- Detailed disclosure of climate-related risks, such as according to the framework established by the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD), including:
  - Board governance measures;
  - Corporate strategy;
  - Risk management analyses; and
  - Metrics and targets.
- Appropriate GHG emissions reduction targets.

For **2022**, “appropriate GHG emissions reductions targets” will be any well-defined GHG reduction targets. Targets for Scope 3 emissions will not be required for 2022 but the targets should cover at least a significant portion of the company’s direct emissions. Expectations about what constitutes “minimum steps to mitigate risks related to climate change” will increase over time.


## Governance Failures

Under extraordinary circumstances, vote against or withhold from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board, due to:


- Material failures of governance, stewardship, risk oversight<sup>11</sup>, or fiduciary responsibilities at the company;
- Failure to replace management as appropriate; or
- Egregious actions related to a director’s service on other boards that raise substantial doubt about his or her ability to effectively oversee management and serve the best interests of shareholders at any company.

## Voting on Director Nominees in Contested Elections

### Vote-No Campaigns

-  **General Recommendation:** In cases where companies are targeted in connection with public “vote-no” campaigns, evaluate director nominees under the existing governance policies for voting on director nominees in uncontested elections. Take into consideration the arguments submitted by shareholders and other publicly available information.

### Proxy Contests/Proxy Access

-  **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on the election of directors in contested elections, considering the following factors:

- Long-term financial performance of the company relative to its industry;
- Management’s track record;
- Background to the contested election;
- Nominee qualifications and any compensatory arrangements;
- Strategic plan of dissident slate and quality of the critique against management;
- Likelihood that the proposed goals and objectives can be achieved (both slates); and

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<sup>11</sup> Examples of failure of risk oversight include but are not limited to: bribery; large or serial fines or sanctions from regulatory



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bodies; demonstrably poor risk oversight of environmental and social issues, including climate change; significant adverse legal judgments or settlement; or hedging of company stock.

- Stock ownership positions.

In the case of candidates nominated pursuant to proxy access, vote case-by-case considering any applicable factors listed above or additional factors which may be relevant, including those that are specific to the company, to the nominee(s) and/or to the nature of the election (such as whether there are more candidates than board seats).

## Other Board-Related Proposals

### Adopt Anti-Hedging/Pledging/Speculative Investments Policy



**General Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals seeking a policy that prohibits named executive officers from engaging in derivative or speculative transactions involving company stock, including hedging, holding stock in a margin account, or pledging stock as collateral for a loan. However, the company's existing policies regarding responsible use of company stock will be considered.

### Board Refreshment

Board refreshment is best implemented through an ongoing program of individual director evaluations, conducted annually, to ensure the evolving needs of the board are met and to bring in fresh perspectives, skills, and diversity as needed.

### Term/Tenure Limits



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on management proposals regarding director term/tenure limits, considering:

- The rationale provided for adoption of the term/tenure limit;
- The robustness of the company's board evaluation process;
- Whether the limit is of sufficient length to allow for a broad range of director tenures;
- Whether the limit would disadvantage independent directors compared to non-independent directors; and
- Whether the board will impose the limit evenly, and not have the ability to waive it in a discriminatory manner.

Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals asking for the company to adopt director term/tenure limits, considering:

- The scope of the shareholder proposal; and
- Evidence of problematic issues at the company combined with, or exacerbated by, a lack of board refreshment.

### Age Limits



**General Recommendation:** Generally vote against management and shareholder proposals to limit the tenure of independent directors through mandatory retirement ages. Vote for proposals to remove mandatory age limits.

### Board Size



**General Recommendation:** Vote for proposals seeking to fix the board size or designate a range for the board size.

Vote against proposals that give management the ability to alter the size of the board outside of a specified range without shareholder approval.

### Classification/Declassification of the Board



**General Recommendation:** Vote against proposals to classify (stagger) the board.

Vote for proposals to repeal classified boards and to elect all directors annually.

### CEO Succession Planning

➤ **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals seeking disclosure on a CEO succession planning policy, considering, at a minimum, the following factors:

- The reasonableness/scope of the request; and
- The company's existing disclosure on its current CEO succession planning process.

### Cumulative Voting

➤ **General Recommendation:** Generally vote against management proposals to eliminate cumulate voting, and for shareholder proposals to restore or provide for cumulative voting, unless:

- The company has proxy access<sup>12</sup>, thereby allowing shareholders to nominate directors to the company's ballot; and
- The company has adopted a majority vote standard, with a carve-out for plurality voting in situations where there are more nominees than seats, and a director resignation policy to address failed elections.

Vote for proposals for cumulative voting at controlled companies (insider voting power > 50%).

### Director and Officer Indemnification and Liability Protection

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals on director and officer indemnification and liability protection.

Vote against proposals that would:

- Eliminate entirely directors' and officers' liability for monetary damages for violating the duty of care.
- Expand coverage beyond just legal expenses to liability for acts that are more serious violations of fiduciary obligation than mere carelessness.
- Expand the scope of indemnification to provide for mandatory indemnification of company officials in connection with acts that previously the company was permitted to provide indemnification for, at the discretion of the company's board (*i.e.*, "permissive indemnification"), but that previously the company was not required to indemnify.

Vote for only those proposals providing such expanded coverage in cases when a director's or officer's legal defense was unsuccessful if both of the following apply:

- If the director was found to have acted in good faith and in a manner that s/he reasonably believed was in the best interests of the company; and
- If only the director's legal expenses would be covered.

### Establish/Amend Nominee Qualifications


➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals that establish or amend director qualifications. Votes should be based on the reasonableness of the criteria and the degree to which they may preclude dissident nominees from joining the board.

Vote case-by-case on shareholder resolutions seeking a director nominee who possesses a particular subject matter expertise, considering:

<sup>12</sup> A proxy access right that meets the [recommended guidelines](#).


- The company's board committee structure, existing subject matter expertise, and board nomination provisions relative to that of its peers;
- The company's existing board and management oversight mechanisms regarding the issue for which board oversight is sought;
- The company's disclosure and performance relating to the issue for which board oversight is sought and any significant related controversies; and
- The scope and structure of the proposal.

### **Establish Other Board Committee Proposals**


 **General Recommendation:** Generally vote against shareholder proposals to establish a new board committee, as such proposals seek a specific oversight mechanism/structure that potentially limits a company's flexibility to determine an appropriate oversight mechanism for itself. However, the following factors will be considered:

- Existing oversight mechanisms (including current committee structure) regarding the issue for which board oversight is sought;
- Level of disclosure regarding the issue for which board oversight is sought;
- Company performance related to the issue for which board oversight is sought;
- Board committee structure compared to that of other companies in its industry sector; and
- The scope and structure of the proposal.

### **Filling Vacancies/Removal of Directors**

 **General Recommendation:** Vote against proposals that provide that directors may be removed only for cause. Vote for proposals to restore shareholders' ability to remove directors with or without cause. Vote against proposals that provide that only continuing directors may elect replacements to fill board vacancies. Vote for proposals that permit shareholders to elect directors to fill board vacancies.

### **Independent Board Chair**

 **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for shareholder proposals requiring that the board chair position be filled by an independent director, taking into consideration the following:

- The scope and rationale of the proposal;
- The company's current board leadership structure;
- The company's governance structure and practices;
- Company performance; and
- Any other relevant factors that may be applicable.

The following factors will increase the likelihood of a "for" recommendation:

- A majority non-independent board and/or the presence of non-independent directors on key board committees;
- A weak or poorly-defined lead independent director role that fails to serve as an appropriate counterbalance to a combined CEO/chair role;
- The presence of an executive or non-independent chair in addition to the CEO, a recent recombination of the role of CEO and chair, and/or departure from a structure with an independent chair;
- Evidence that the board has failed to oversee and address material risks facing the company;
- A material governance failure, particularly if the board has failed to adequately respond to shareholder concerns or if the board has materially diminished shareholder rights; or
- Evidence that the board has failed to intervene when management's interests are contrary to shareholders' interests.

**Majority of Independent Directors/Establishment of Independent Committees**

- **General Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals asking that a majority or more of directors be independent unless the board composition already meets the proposed threshold by ISS' definition of Independent Director (See [ISS' Classification of Directors](#).)

Vote for shareholder proposals asking that board audit, compensation, and/or nominating committees be composed exclusively of independent directors unless they currently meet that standard.

**Majority Vote Standard for the Election of Directors**

- **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for management proposals to adopt a majority of votes cast standard for directors in uncontested elections. Vote against if no carve-out for a plurality vote standard in contested elections is included.

Generally vote for precatory and binding shareholder resolutions requesting that the board change the company's bylaws to stipulate that directors need to be elected with an affirmative majority of votes cast, provided it does not conflict with the state law where the company is incorporated. Binding resolutions need to allow for a carve-out for a plurality vote standard when there are more nominees than board seats.

Companies are strongly encouraged to also adopt a post-election policy (also known as a director resignation policy) that will provide guidelines so that the company will promptly address the situation of a holdover director.

**Proxy Access**

- **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for management and shareholder proposals for proxy access with the following provisions:
- **Ownership threshold:** maximum requirement not more than three percent (3%) of the voting power;
  - **Ownership duration:** maximum requirement not longer than three (3) years of continuous ownership for each member of the nominating group;
  - **Aggregation:** minimal or no limits on the number of shareholders permitted to form a nominating group;
  - **Cap:** cap on nominees of generally twenty-five percent (25%) of the board.

Review for reasonableness any other restrictions on the right of proxy access.  
Generally vote against proposals that are more restrictive than these guidelines.

**Require More Nominees than Open Seats**

- **General Recommendation:** Vote against shareholder proposals that would require a company to nominate more candidates than the number of open board seats.

**Shareholder Engagement Policy (Shareholder Advisory Committee)**

- **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting that the board establish an internal mechanism/process, which may include a committee, in order to improve communications between directors and shareholders, unless the company has the following features, as appropriate:
- Established a communication structure that goes beyond the exchange requirements to facilitate the exchange of information between shareholders and members of the board;
  - Effectively disclosed information with respect to this structure to its shareholders;
  - Company has not ignored majority-supported shareholder proposals, or a majority withhold vote on a director nominee; and

- The company has an independent chair or a lead director, according to [ISS' definition](#). This individual must be made available for periodic consultation and direct communication with major shareholders.



## 2. Audit-Related

### Auditor Indemnification and Limitation of Liability

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on the issue of auditor indemnification and limitation of liability. Factors to be assessed include, but are not limited to:

- The terms of the auditor agreement—the degree to which these agreements impact shareholders' rights;
- The motivation and rationale for establishing the agreements;
- The quality of the company's disclosure; and
- The company's historical practices in the audit area.

Vote against or withhold from members of an audit committee in situations where there is persuasive evidence that the audit committee entered into an inappropriate indemnification agreement with its auditor that limits the ability of the company, or its shareholders, to pursue legitimate legal recourse against the audit firm.

### Auditor Ratification

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote for proposals to ratify auditors unless any of the following apply:

- An auditor has a financial interest in or association with the company, and is therefore not independent;
- There is reason to believe that the independent auditor has rendered an opinion that is neither accurate nor indicative of the company's financial position;
- Poor accounting practices are identified that rise to a serious level of concern, such as fraud or misapplication of GAAP; or
- Fees for non-audit services ("Other" fees) are excessive.

Non-audit fees are excessive if:

- Non-audit ("other") fees > audit fees + audit-related fees + tax compliance/preparation fees

Tax compliance and preparation include the preparation of original and amended tax returns and refund claims, and tax payment planning. All other services in the tax category, such as tax advice, planning, or consulting, should be added to "Other" fees. If the breakout of tax fees cannot be determined, add all tax fees to "Other" fees.

In circumstances where "Other" fees include fees related to significant one-time capital structure events (such as initial public offerings, bankruptcy emergence, and spin-offs) and the company makes public disclosure of the amount and nature of those fees that are an exception to the standard "non-audit fee" category, then such fees may be excluded from the non-audit fees considered in determining the ratio of non-audit to audit/audit-related fees/tax compliance and preparation for purposes of determining whether non-audit fees are excessive.

### Shareholder Proposals Limiting Non-Audit Services

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals asking companies to prohibit or limit their auditors from engaging in non-audit services.

### Shareholder Proposals on Audit Firm Rotation

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals asking for audit firm rotation, taking into account:

- The tenure of the audit firm;

- The length of rotation specified in the proposal;
- Any significant audit-related issues at the company;
- The number of Audit Committee meetings held each year;
- The number of financial experts serving on the committee; and
- Whether the company has a periodic renewal process where the auditor is evaluated for both audit quality and competitive price.

### 3. Shareholder Rights & Defenses

#### Advance Notice Requirements for Shareholder Proposals/Nominations

- **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on advance notice proposals, giving support to those proposals which allow shareholders to submit proposals/nominations as close to the meeting date as reasonably possible and within the broadest window possible, recognizing the need to allow sufficient notice for company, regulatory, and shareholder review.

To be reasonable, the company's deadline for shareholder notice of a proposal/nominations must be no earlier than 120 days prior to the anniversary of the previous year's meeting and have a submittal window of no shorter than 30 days from the beginning of the notice period (also known as a 90-120-day window). The submittal window is the period under which shareholders must file their proposals/nominations prior to the deadline.

In general, support additional efforts by companies to ensure full disclosure in regard to a proponent's economic and voting position in the company so long as the informational requirements are reasonable and aimed at providing shareholders with the necessary information to review such proposals.

#### Amend Bylaws without Shareholder Consent

- **General Recommendation:** Vote against proposals giving the board exclusive authority to amend the bylaws.

Vote case-by-case on proposals giving the board the ability to amend the bylaws in addition to shareholders, taking into account the following:

- Any impediments to shareholders' ability to amend the bylaws (i.e. supermajority voting requirements);
- The company's ownership structure and historical voting turnout;
- Whether the board could amend bylaws adopted by shareholders; and
- Whether shareholders would retain the ability to ratify any board-initiated amendments.

#### Control Share Acquisition Provisions

- **General Recommendation:** Vote for proposals to opt out of control share acquisition statutes unless doing so would enable the completion of a takeover that would be detrimental to shareholders.

Vote against proposals to amend the charter to include control share acquisition provisions.

Vote for proposals to restore voting rights to the control shares.

Control share acquisition statutes function by denying shares their voting rights when they contribute to ownership in excess of certain thresholds. Voting rights for those shares exceeding ownership limits may only be restored by approval of either a majority or supermajority of disinterested shares. Thus, control share acquisition statutes effectively require a hostile bidder to put its offer to a shareholder vote or risk voting disenfranchisement if the bidder continues buying up a large block of shares.

#### Control Share Cash-Out Provisions

- **General Recommendation:** Vote for proposals to opt out of control share cash-out statutes.

Control share cash-out statutes give dissident shareholders the right to "cash-out" of their position in a company at the expense of the shareholder who has taken a control position. In other words, when an investor crosses a

preset threshold level, remaining shareholders are given the right to sell their shares to the acquirer, who must buy them at the highest acquiring price.

### Disgorgement Provisions

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote for proposals to opt out of state disgorgement provisions.

Disgorgement provisions require an acquirer or potential acquirer of more than a certain percentage of a company's stock to disgorge, or pay back, to the company any profits realized from the sale of that company's stock purchased 24 months before achieving control status. All sales of company stock by the acquirer occurring within a certain period of time (between 18 months and 24 months) prior to the investor's gaining control status are subject to these recapture-of-profits provisions.

### Fair Price Provisions

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to adopt fair price provisions (provisions that stipulate that an acquirer must pay the same price to acquire all shares as it paid to acquire the control shares), evaluating factors such as the vote required to approve the proposed acquisition, the vote required to repeal the fair price provision, and the mechanism for determining the fair price.

Generally vote against fair price provisions with shareholder vote requirements greater than a majority of disinterested shares.

### Freeze-Out Provisions

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote for proposals to opt out of state freeze-out provisions. Freeze-out provisions force an investor who surpasses a certain ownership threshold in a company to wait a specified period of time before gaining control of the company.

### Greenmail

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote for proposals to adopt anti-greenmail charter or bylaw amendments or otherwise restrict a company's ability to make greenmail payments.

Vote case-by-case on anti-greenmail proposals when they are bundled with other charter or bylaw amendments.

Greenmail payments are targeted share repurchases by management of company stock from individuals or groups seeking control of the company. Since only the hostile party receives payment, usually at a substantial premium over the market value of its shares, the practice discriminates against all other shareholders.

### Shareholder Litigation Rights

#### **Federal Forum Selection Provisions**


Federal forum selection provisions require that U.S. federal courts be the sole forum for shareholders to litigate claims arising under federal securities law.

➤ **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for federal forum selection provisions in the charter or bylaws that specify "the district courts of the United States" as the exclusive forum for federal securities law matters, in the absence of serious concerns about corporate governance or board responsiveness to shareholders.

Vote against provisions that restrict the forum to a particular federal district court; unilateral adoption (without a shareholder vote) of such a provision will generally be considered a one-time failure under the [Unilateral Bylaw/Charter Amendments](#) policy.

## Exclusive Forum Provisions for State Law Matters

Exclusive forum provisions in the charter or bylaws restrict shareholders' ability to bring derivative lawsuits against the company, for claims arising out of state corporate law, to the courts of a particular state (generally the state of incorporation).

 **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for charter or bylaw provisions that specify courts located within the state of Delaware as the exclusive forum for corporate law matters for Delaware corporations, in the absence of serious concerns about corporate governance or board responsiveness to shareholders.


For states other than Delaware, vote case-by-case on exclusive forum provisions, taking into consideration:

- The company's stated rationale for adopting such a provision;
- Disclosure of past harm from duplicative shareholder lawsuits in more than one forum;
- The breadth of application of the charter or bylaw provision, including the types of lawsuits to which it would apply and the definition of key terms; and
- Governance features such as shareholders' ability to repeal the provision at a later date (including the vote standard applied when shareholders attempt to amend the charter or bylaws) and their ability to hold directors accountable through annual director elections and a majority vote standard in uncontested elections.

Generally vote against provisions that specify a state other than the state of incorporation as the exclusive forum for corporate law matters, or that specify a particular local court within the state; unilateral adoption of such a provision will generally be considered a one-time failure under the [Unilateral Bylaw/Charter Amendments](#) policy.


## Fee shifting

Fee-shifting provisions in the charter or bylaws require that a shareholder who sues a company unsuccessfully pay all litigation expenses of the defendant corporation and its directors and officers.

 **General Recommendation:** Generally vote against provisions that mandate fee-shifting whenever plaintiffs are not completely successful on the merits (i.e., including cases where the plaintiffs are partially successful).

Unilateral adoption of a fee-shifting provision will generally be considered an ongoing failure under the [Unilateral Bylaw/Charter Amendments](#) policy.

## Net Operating Loss (NOL) Protective Amendments

 **General Recommendation:** Vote against proposals to adopt a protective amendment for the stated purpose of protecting a company's net operating losses (NOL) if the effective term of the protective amendment would exceed the shorter of three years and the exhaustion of the NOL.

Vote case-by-case, considering the following factors, for management proposals to adopt an NOL protective amendment that would remain in effect for the shorter of three years (or less) and the exhaustion of the NOL:

- The ownership threshold (NOL protective amendments generally prohibit stock ownership transfers that would result in a new 5-percent holder or increase the stock ownership percentage of an existing 5-percent holder);
- The value of the NOLs;

- Shareholder protection mechanisms (sunset provision or commitment to cause expiration of the protective amendment upon exhaustion or expiration of the NOL);
- The company's existing governance structure including: board independence, existing takeover defenses, track record of responsiveness to shareholders, and any other problematic governance concerns; and
- Any other factors that may be applicable.

## Poison Pills (Shareholder Rights Plans)

### Shareholder Proposals to Put Pill to a Vote and/or Adopt a Pill Policy



**General Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals requesting that the company submit its poison pill to a shareholder vote or redeem it unless the company has: (1) A shareholder-approved poison pill in place; or (2) The company has adopted a policy concerning the adoption of a pill in the future specifying that the board will only adopt a shareholder rights plan if either:

- Shareholders have approved the adoption of the plan; or
- The board, in its exercise of its fiduciary responsibilities, determines that it is in the best interest of shareholders under the circumstances to adopt a pill without the delay in adoption that would result from seeking stockholder approval (i.e., the “fiduciary out” provision). A poison pill adopted under this fiduciary out will be put to a shareholder ratification vote within 12 months of adoption or expire. If the pill is not approved by a majority of the votes cast on this issue, the plan will immediately terminate.

If the shareholder proposal calls for a time period of less than 12 months for shareholder ratification after adoption, vote for the proposal, but add the caveat that a vote within 12 months would be considered sufficient implementation.

### Management Proposals to Ratify a Poison Pill



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on management proposals on poison pill ratification, focusing on the features of the shareholder rights plan. Rights plans should contain the following attributes:

- No lower than a 20 percent trigger, flip-in or flip-over;
- A term of no more than three years;
- No deadhand, slowhand, no-hand, or similar feature that limits the ability of a future board to redeem the pill;
- Shareholder redemption feature (qualifying offer clause); if the board refuses to redeem the pill 90 days after a qualifying offer is announced, 10 percent of the shares may call a special meeting or seek a written consent to vote on rescinding the pill.

In addition, the rationale for adopting the pill should be thoroughly explained by the company. In examining the request for the pill, take into consideration the company's existing governance structure, including: board independence, existing takeover defenses, and any problematic governance concerns.

### Management Proposals to Ratify a Pill to Preserve Net Operating Losses (NOLs)



**General Recommendation:** Vote against proposals to adopt a poison pill for the stated purpose of protecting a company's net operating losses (NOL) if the term of the pill would exceed the shorter of three years and the exhaustion of the NOL.

Vote case-by-case on management proposals for poison pill ratification, considering the following factors, if the term of the pill would be the shorter of three years (or less) and the exhaustion of the NOL:

- The ownership threshold to transfer (NOL pills generally have a trigger slightly below 5 percent);
- The value of the NOLs;
- Shareholder protection mechanisms (sunset provision, or commitment to cause expiration of the pill upon

exhaustion or expiration of NOLs);



- The company's existing governance structure including: board independence, existing takeover defenses, track record of responsiveness to shareholders, and any other problematic governance concerns; and
- Any other factors that may be applicable.

### **Proxy Voting Disclosure, Confidentiality, and Tabulation**



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding proxy voting mechanics, taking into consideration whether implementation of the proposal is likely to enhance or protect shareholder rights. Specific issues covered under the policy include, but are not limited to, confidential voting of individual proxies and ballots, confidentiality of running vote tallies, and the treatment of abstentions and/or broker non-votes in the company's vote-counting methodology.

While a variety of factors may be considered in each analysis, the guiding principles are: transparency, consistency, and fairness in the proxy voting process. The factors considered, as applicable to the proposal, may include:

- The scope and structure of the proposal;
- The company's stated confidential voting policy (or other relevant policies) and whether it ensures a "level playing field" by providing shareholder proponents with equal access to vote information prior to the annual meeting;
- The company's vote standard for management and shareholder proposals and whether it ensures consistency and fairness in the proxy voting process and maintains the integrity of vote results;
- Whether the company's disclosure regarding its vote counting method and other relevant voting policies with respect to management and shareholder proposals are consistent and clear;
- Any recent controversies or concerns related to the company's proxy voting mechanics;
- Any unintended consequences resulting from implementation of the proposal; and
- Any other factors that may be relevant.

### **Ratification Proposals: Management Proposals to Ratify Existing Charter or Bylaw Provisions**



**General Recommendation:** Generally vote against management proposals to ratify provisions of the company's existing charter or bylaws, unless these governance provisions align with best practice.

In addition, voting against/withhold from individual directors, members of the governance committee, or the full board may be warranted, considering:

- The presence of a shareholder proposal addressing the same issue on the same ballot;
- The board's rationale for seeking ratification;
- Disclosure of actions to be taken by the board should the ratification proposal fail;
- Disclosure of shareholder engagement regarding the board's ratification request;
- The level of impairment to shareholders' rights caused by the existing provision;
- The history of management and shareholder proposals on the provision at the company's past meetings;
- Whether the current provision was adopted in response to the shareholder proposal;
- The company's ownership structure; and
- Previous use of ratification proposals to exclude shareholder proposals.

### **Reimbursing Proxy Solicitation Expenses**



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to reimburse proxy solicitation expenses.

When voting in conjunction with support of a dissident slate, vote for the reimbursement of all appropriate proxy solicitation expenses associated with the election.

Generally vote for shareholder proposals calling for the reimbursement of reasonable costs incurred in connection with nominating one or more candidates in a contested election where the following apply:

- The election of fewer than 50 percent of the directors to be elected is contested in the election;
- One or more of the dissident's candidates is elected;
- Shareholders are not permitted to cumulate their votes for directors; and
- The election occurred, and the expenses were incurred, after the adoption of this bylaw.

### **Reincorporation Proposals**



**General Recommendation:** Management or shareholder proposals to change a company's state of incorporation should be evaluated case-by-case, giving consideration to both financial and corporate governance concerns including the following:

- Reasons for reincorporation;
- Comparison of company's governance practices and provisions prior to and following the reincorporation; and
- Comparison of corporation laws of original state and destination state.

Vote for reincorporation when the economic factors outweigh any neutral or negative governance changes.

### **Shareholder Ability to Act by Written Consent**



**General Recommendation:** Generally vote against management and shareholder proposals to restrict or prohibit shareholders' ability to act by written consent.

Generally vote for management and shareholder proposals that provide shareholders with the ability to act by written consent, taking into account the following factors:

- Shareholders' current right to act by written consent;
- The consent threshold;
- The inclusion of exclusionary or prohibitive language;
- Investor ownership structure; and
- Shareholder support of, and management's response to, previous shareholder proposals.

Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals if, in addition to the considerations above, the company has the following governance and antitakeover provisions:

- An unfettered<sup>13</sup> right for shareholders to call special meetings at a 10 percent threshold;
- A majority vote standard in uncontested director elections;
- No non-shareholder-approved pill; and
- An annually elected board.

### **Shareholder Ability to Call Special Meetings**



**General Recommendation:** Vote against management or shareholder proposals to restrict or prohibit shareholders' ability to call special meetings.

Generally vote for management or shareholder proposals that provide shareholders with the ability to call special meetings taking into account the following factors:

- Shareholders' current right to call special meetings;
- Minimum ownership threshold necessary to call special meetings (10 percent preferred);
- The inclusion of exclusionary or prohibitive language;

<sup>13</sup> "Unfettered" means no restrictions on agenda items, no restrictions on the number of shareholders who can group together to reach the 10 percent threshold, and only reasonable limits on when a meeting can be called: no greater than 30 days after the last annual meeting and no greater than 90 prior to the next annual meeting.

- Investor ownership structure; and
- Shareholder support of, and management's response to, previous shareholder proposals.

### **Stakeholder Provisions**

- **General Recommendation:** Vote against proposals that ask the board to consider non-shareholder constituencies or other non-financial effects when evaluating a merger or business combination.

### **State Antitakeover Statutes**

- **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to opt in or out of state takeover statutes (including fair price provisions, stakeholder laws, poison pill endorsements, severance pay and labor contract provisions, and anti-greenmail provisions).

### **Supermajority Vote Requirements**

- **General Recommendation:** Vote against proposals to require a supermajority shareholder vote.
- Vote for management or shareholder proposals to reduce supermajority vote requirements. However, for companies with shareholder(s) who have significant ownership levels, vote case-by-case, taking into account:
  - Ownership structure;
  - Quorum requirements; and
  - Vote requirements.

### **Virtual Shareholder Meetings**

- **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for management proposals allowing for the convening of shareholder meetings by electronic means, so long as they do not preclude in-person meetings. Companies are encouraged to disclose the circumstances under which virtual-only<sup>14</sup> meetings would be held, and to allow for comparable rights and opportunities for shareholders to participate electronically as they would have during an in-person meeting.

Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals concerning virtual-only meetings, considering:

- Scope and rationale of the proposal; and
- Concerns identified with the company's prior meeting practices.

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<sup>14</sup> Virtual-only shareholder meeting" refers to a meeting of shareholders that is held exclusively using technology without a

corresponding in-person meeting.

## 4. Capital/Restructuring

### Capital

#### Adjustments to Par Value of Common Stock



**General Recommendation:** Vote for management proposals to reduce the par value of common stock unless the action is being taken to facilitate an anti-takeover device or some other negative corporate governance action.

Vote for management proposals to eliminate par value.

#### Common Stock Authorization

##### General Authorization Requests



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to increase the number of authorized shares of common stock that are to be used for general corporate purposes:

- If share usage (outstanding plus reserved) is less than 50% of the current authorized shares, vote for an increase of up to **50%** of current authorized shares.
- If share usage is 50% to 100% of the current authorized, vote for an increase of up to **100%** of current authorized shares.
- If share usage is greater than current authorized shares, vote for an increase of up to the current share usage.
- In the case of a stock split, the allowable increase is calculated (per above) based on the post-split adjusted authorization.

Generally vote against proposed increases, even if within the above ratios, if the proposal or the company's prior or ongoing use of authorized shares is problematic, including, but not limited to:

- The proposal seeks to increase the number of authorized shares of the class of common stock that has superior voting rights to other share classes;
- On the same ballot is a proposal for a reverse split for which support is warranted despite the fact that it would result in an excessive increase in the share authorization;
- The company has a non-shareholder approved poison pill (including an NOL pill); or
- The company has previous sizeable placements (within the past 3 years) of stock with insiders at prices substantially below market value, or with problematic voting rights, without shareholder approval.

However, generally vote for proposed increases beyond the above ratios or problematic situations when there is disclosure of specific and severe risks to shareholders of not approving the request, such as:

- In, or subsequent to, the company's most recent 10-K filing, the company discloses that there is substantial doubt about its ability to continue as a going concern;
- The company states that there is a risk of imminent bankruptcy or imminent liquidation if shareholders do not approve the increase in authorized capital; or
- A government body has in the past year required the company to increase its capital ratios.

For companies incorporated in states that allow increases in authorized capital without shareholder approval, generally vote withhold or against all nominees if a unilateral capital authorization increase does not conform to the above policies.

**Specific Authorization Requests**

➤ **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals to increase the number of authorized common shares where the primary purpose of the increase is to issue shares in connection with transaction(s) (such as acquisitions, SPAC transactions, private placements, or similar transactions) on the same ballot, or disclosed in the proxy statement, that warrant support. For such transactions, the allowable increase will be the greater of:

- twice the amount needed to support the transactions on the ballot, and
- the allowable increase as calculated for general issuances above.

**Dual Class Structure**

➤ **General Recommendation:** Generally vote against proposals to create a new class of common stock unless:

- The company discloses a compelling rationale for the dual-class capital structure, such as:
- The company's auditor has concluded that there is substantial doubt about the company's ability to continue as a going concern; or
- The new class of shares will be transitory;
- The new class is intended for financing purposes with minimal or no dilution to current shareholders in both the short term and long term; and
- The new class is not designed to preserve or increase the voting power of an insider or significant shareholder.

**Issue Stock for Use with Rights Plan**

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote against proposals that increase authorized common stock for the explicit purpose of implementing a non-shareholder-approved shareholder rights plan (poison pill).

**Preemptive Rights**

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals that seek preemptive rights, taking into consideration:

- The size of the company;
- The shareholder base; and
- The liquidity of the stock.

**Preferred Stock Authorization****General Authorization Requests**

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to increase the number of authorized shares of preferred stock that are to be used for general corporate purposes:

- If share usage (outstanding plus reserved) is less than 50% of the current authorized shares, vote for an increase of up to **50%** of current authorized shares.
- If share usage is 50% to 100% of the current authorized, vote for an increase of up to **100%** of current authorized shares.
- If share usage is greater than current authorized shares, vote for an increase of up to the current share usage.
- In the case of a stock split, the allowable increase is calculated (per above) based on the post-split adjusted authorization.
- If no preferred shares are currently issued and outstanding, vote against the request, unless the company discloses a specific use for the shares.

Generally vote against proposed increases, even if within the above ratios, if the proposal or the company's prior



or ongoing use of authorized shares is problematic, including, but not limited to:


- If the shares requested are blank check preferred shares that can be used for antitakeover purposes;<sup>15</sup>
- The company seeks to increase a class of non-convertible preferred shares entitled to more than one vote per share on matters that do not solely affect the rights of preferred stockholders "supervoting shares");
- The company seeks to increase a class of convertible preferred shares entitled to a number of votes greater than the number of common shares into which they are convertible ("supervoting shares") on matters that do not solely affect the rights of preferred stockholders;
- The stated intent of the increase in the general authorization is to allow the company to increase an existing designated class of supervoting preferred shares;
- On the same ballot is a proposal for a reverse split for which support is warranted despite the fact that it would result in an excessive increase in the share authorization;
- The company has a non-shareholder approved poison pill (including an NOL pill); or
- The company has previous sizeable placements (within the past 3 years) of stock with insiders at prices substantially below market value, or with problematic voting rights, without shareholder approval.

However, generally vote for proposed increases beyond the above ratios or problematic situations when there is disclosure of specific and severe risks to shareholders of not approving the request, such as:

- In, or subsequent to, the company's most recent 10-K filing, the company discloses that there is substantial doubt about its ability to continue as a going concern;
- The company states that there is a risk of imminent bankruptcy or imminent liquidation if shareholders do not approve the increase in authorized capital; or
- A government body has in the past year required the company to increase its capital ratios.


For companies incorporated in states that allow increases in authorized capital without shareholder approval, generally vote withhold or against all nominees if a unilateral capital authorization increase does not conform to the above policies.

#### **Specific Authorization Requests**

 **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals to increase the number of authorized preferred shares where the primary purpose of the increase is to issue shares in connection with transaction(s) (such as acquisitions, SPAC transactions, private placements, or similar transactions) on the same ballot, or disclosed in the proxy statement, that warrant support. For such transactions, the allowable increase will be the greater of:

- twice the amount needed to support the transactions on the ballot, and
- the allowable increase as calculated for general issuances above.

#### **Recapitalization Plans**


 **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on recapitalizations (reclassifications of securities), taking into account the following:

- More simplified capital structure;
- Enhanced liquidity;
- Fairness of conversion terms;
- Impact on voting power and dividends;
- Reasons for the reclassification;

<sup>15</sup> To be acceptable, appropriate disclosure would be needed that the shares are “declawed”: i.e., representation by the board that it will not, without prior stockholder approval, issue or use the preferred stock for any defensive or anti-takeover purpose or for the purpose of implementing any stockholder rights plan.

- Conflicts of interest; and
- Other alternatives considered.

### Reverse Stock Splits


 **General Recommendation:** Vote for management proposals to implement a reverse stock split if:

- The number of authorized shares will be proportionately reduced; or
- The effective increase in authorized shares is equal to or less than the allowable increase calculated in accordance with ISS' Common Stock Authorization policy.

Vote case-by-case on proposals that do not meet either of the above conditions, taking into consideration the following factors:

- Stock exchange notification to the company of a potential delisting;
- Disclosure of substantial doubt about the company's ability to continue as a going concern without additional financing;
- The company's rationale; or
- Other factors as applicable.


### Share Repurchase Programs

 **General Recommendation:** For U.S.-incorporated companies, and foreign-incorporated U.S. Domestic Issuers that are traded solely on U.S. exchanges, vote for management proposals to institute open-market share repurchase plans in which all shareholders may participate on equal terms, or to grant the board authority to conduct open-market repurchases, in the absence of company-specific concerns regarding:


- Greenmail,
- The use of buybacks to inappropriately manipulate incentive compensation metrics,
- Threats to the company's long-term viability, or
- Other company-specific factors as warranted.

Vote case-by-case on proposals to repurchase shares directly from specified shareholders, balancing the stated rationale against the possibility for the repurchase authority to be misused, such as to repurchase shares from insiders at a premium to market price.


### Share Repurchase Programs Shareholder Proposals

 **General Recommendation:** Generally vote against shareholder proposals prohibiting executives from selling shares of company stock during periods in which the company has announced that it may or will be repurchasing shares of its stock. Vote for the proposal when there is a pattern of abuse by executives exercising options or selling shares during periods of share buybacks.

### Stock Distributions: Splits and Dividends

 **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for management proposals to increase the common share authorization for stock split or stock dividend, provided that the effective increase in authorized shares is equal to or is less than the allowable increase calculated in accordance with ISS' Common Stock Authorization policy.

### Tracking Stock

 **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on the creation of tracking stock, weighing the strategic value of the

transaction against such factors as:

- Adverse governance changes;
- Excessive increases in authorized capital stock;
- Unfair method of distribution;
- Diminution of voting rights;
- Adverse conversion features;
- Negative impact on stock option plans; and
- Alternatives such as spin-off.

## Restructuring

### Appraisal Rights

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote for proposals to restore or provide shareholders with rights of appraisal.

### Asset Purchases

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on asset purchase proposals, considering the following factors:

- Purchase price;
- Fairness opinion;
- Financial and strategic benefits;
- How the deal was negotiated;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Other alternatives for the business;
- Non-completion risk.

### Asset Sales

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on asset sales, considering the following factors:

- Impact on the balance sheet/working capital;
- Potential elimination of diseconomies;
- Anticipated financial and operating benefits;
- Anticipated use of funds;
- Value received for the asset;
- Fairness opinion;
- How the deal was negotiated;
- Conflicts of interest.

### Bundled Proposals

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on bundled or “conditional” proxy proposals. In the case of items that are conditioned upon each other, examine the benefits and costs of the packaged items. In instances when the joint effect of the conditioned items is not in shareholders’ best interests, vote against the proposals. If the combined effect is positive, support such proposals.

### Conversion of Securities

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding conversion of securities. When evaluating these proposals, the investor should review the dilution to existing shareholders, the conversion price relative to market value, financial issues, control issues, termination penalties, and conflicts of interest.

Vote for the conversion if it is expected that the company will be subject to onerous penalties or will be forced to file for bankruptcy if the transaction is not approved.

### **Corporate Reorganization/Debt Restructuring/Prepackaged Bankruptcy Plans/Reverse Leveraged Buyouts/Wrap Plans**



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to increase common and/or preferred shares and to issue shares as part of a debt restructuring plan, after evaluating:

- Dilution to existing shareholders' positions;
- Terms of the offer - discount/premium in purchase price to investor, including any fairness opinion; termination penalties; exit strategy;
- Financial issues - company's financial situation; degree of need for capital; use of proceeds; effect of the financing on the company's cost of capital;
- Management's efforts to pursue other alternatives;
- Control issues - change in management; change in control, guaranteed board and committee seats; standstill provisions; voting agreements; veto power over certain corporate actions; and
- Conflict of interest - arm's length transaction, managerial incentives.

Vote for the debt restructuring if it is expected that the company will file for bankruptcy if the transaction is not approved.

### **Formation of Holding Company**



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding the formation of a holding company, taking into consideration the following:

- The reasons for the change;
- Any financial or tax benefits;
- Regulatory benefits;
- Increases in capital structure; and
- Changes to the articles of incorporation or bylaws of the company.

Absent compelling financial reasons to recommend for the transaction, vote against the formation of a holding company if the transaction would include either of the following:

- Increases in common or preferred stock in excess of the allowable maximum (see discussion under "Capital"); or
- Adverse changes in shareholder rights.

### **Going Private and Going Dark Transactions (LBOs and Minority Squeeze-outs)**



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on going private transactions, taking into account the following:

- Offer price/premium;
- Fairness opinion;
- How the deal was negotiated;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Other alternatives/offers considered; and
- Non-completion risk.

Vote case-by-case on going dark transactions, determining whether the transaction enhances shareholder value by taking into consideration:



- Whether the company has attained benefits from being publicly-traded (examination of trading volume, liquidity, and market research of the stock);
- Balanced interests of continuing vs. cashed-out shareholders, taking into account the following:
- Are all shareholders able to participate in the transaction?
- Will there be a liquid market for remaining shareholders following the transaction?
- Does the company have strong corporate governance?
- Will insiders reap the gains of control following the proposed transaction?
- Does the state of incorporation have laws requiring continued reporting that may benefit shareholders?

### Joint Ventures



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to form joint ventures, taking into account the following:

- 
- Percentage of assets/business contributed;
- Percentage ownership;
- Financial and strategic benefits;
- Governance structure;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Other alternatives; and
- Non-completion risk.

### Liquidations



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on liquidations, taking into account the following:

- Management's efforts to pursue other alternatives;
- Appraisal value of assets; and
- The compensation plan for executives managing the liquidation.

Vote for the liquidation if the company will file for bankruptcy if the proposal is not approved.

### Mergers and Acquisitions



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on mergers and acquisitions. Review and evaluate the merits and drawbacks of the proposed transaction, balancing various and sometimes countervailing factors including:

- *Valuation* - Is the value to be received by the target shareholders (or paid by the acquirer) reasonable? While the fairness opinion may provide an initial starting point for assessing valuation reasonableness, emphasis is placed on the offer premium, market reaction, and strategic rationale.
- *Market reaction* - How has the market responded to the proposed deal? A negative market reaction should cause closer scrutiny of a deal.
- *Strategic rationale* - Does the deal make sense strategically? From where is the value derived? Cost and revenue synergies should not be overly aggressive or optimistic, but reasonably achievable. Management should also have a favorable track record of successful integration of historical acquisitions.
- *Negotiations and process* - Were the terms of the transaction negotiated at arm's-length? Was the process fair and equitable? A fair process helps to ensure the best price for shareholders. Significant negotiation "wins" can also signify the deal makers' competency. The comprehensiveness of the sales process (e.g., full auction, partial auction, no auction) can also affect shareholder value.
- *Conflicts of interest* - Are insiders benefiting from the transaction disproportionately and inappropriately as compared to non-insider shareholders? As the result of potential conflicts, the directors and officers of the

company may be more likely to vote to approve a merger than if they did not hold these interests. Consider whether these interests may have influenced these directors and officers to support or recommend the

merger. The CIC figure presented in the "ISS Transaction Summary" section of this report is an aggregate figure that can in certain cases be a misleading indicator of the true value transfer from shareholders to insiders. Where such figure appears to be excessive, analyze the underlying assumptions to determine whether a potential conflict exists.

- *Governance* - Will the combined company have a better or worse governance profile than the current governance profiles of the respective parties to the transaction? If the governance profile is to change for the worse, the burden is on the company to prove that other issues (such as valuation) outweigh any deterioration in governance.

### Private Placements/Warrants/Convertible Debentures



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding private placements, warrants, and convertible debentures taking into consideration:

- Dilution to existing shareholders' position: The amount and timing of shareholder ownership dilution should be weighed against the needs and proposed shareholder benefits of the capital infusion. Although newly issued common stock, absent preemptive rights, is typically dilutive to existing shareholders, share price appreciation is often the necessary event to trigger the exercise of "out of the money" warrants and convertible debt. In these instances from a value standpoint, the negative impact of dilution is mitigated by the increase in the company's stock price that must occur to trigger the dilutive event.
- Terms of the offer (discount/premium in purchase price to investor, including any fairness opinion, conversion features, termination penalties, exit strategy):
  - The terms of the offer should be weighed against the alternatives of the company and in light of company's financial condition. Ideally, the conversion price for convertible debt and the exercise price for warrants should be at a premium to the then prevailing stock price at the time of private placement.
  - When evaluating the magnitude of a private placement discount or premium, consider factors that influence the discount or premium, such as, liquidity, due diligence costs, control and monitoring costs, capital scarcity, information asymmetry, and anticipation of future performance.
- Financial issues:
  - The company's financial condition;
  - Degree of need for capital;
  - Use of proceeds;
  - Effect of the financing on the company's cost of capital;
  - Current and proposed cash burn rate;
  - Going concern viability and the state of the capital and credit markets.
- Management's efforts to pursue alternatives and whether the company engaged in a process to evaluate alternatives: A fair, unconstrained process helps to ensure the best price for shareholders. Financing alternatives can include joint ventures, partnership, merger, or sale of part or all of the company.
- Control issues:
  - Change in management;
  - Change in control;
  - Guaranteed board and committee seats;
  - Standstill provisions;
  - Voting agreements;
  - Veto power over certain corporate actions; and
  - Minority versus majority ownership and corresponding minority discount or majority control premium.

- Conflicts of interest:
  - Conflicts of interest should be viewed from the perspective of the company and the investor.
  - Were the terms of the transaction negotiated at arm's length? Are managerial incentives aligned with shareholder interests?
- Market reaction:
  - The market's response to the proposed deal. A negative market reaction is a cause for concern. Market reaction may be addressed by analyzing the one-day impact on the unaffected stock price.

Vote for the private placement, or for the issuance of warrants and/or convertible debentures in a private placement, if it is expected that the company will file for bankruptcy if the transaction is not approved.

### Reorganization/Restructuring Plan (Bankruptcy)



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to common shareholders on bankruptcy plans of reorganization, considering the following factors including, but not limited to:

- Estimated value and financial prospects of the reorganized company;
- Percentage ownership of current shareholders in the reorganized company;
- Whether shareholders are adequately represented in the reorganization process (particularly through the existence of an Official Equity Committee);
- The cause(s) of the bankruptcy filing, and the extent to which the plan of reorganization addresses the cause(s);
- Existence of a superior alternative to the plan of reorganization; and
- Governance of the reorganized company.

### Special Purpose Acquisition Corporations (SPACs)




**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on SPAC mergers and acquisitions taking into account the following:

- *Valuation* - Is the value being paid by the SPAC reasonable? SPACs generally lack an independent fairness opinion and the financials on the target may be limited. Compare the conversion price with the intrinsic value of the target company provided in the fairness opinion. Also, evaluate the proportionate value of the combined entity attributable to the SPAC IPO shareholders versus the pre-merger value of SPAC. Additionally, a private company discount may be applied to the target if it is a private entity.
- *Market reaction* - How has the market responded to the proposed deal? A negative market reaction may be a cause for concern. Market reaction may be addressed by analyzing the one-day impact on the unaffected stock price.
- *Deal timing* - A main driver for most transactions is that the SPAC charter typically requires the deal to be complete within 18 to 24 months, or the SPAC is to be liquidated. Evaluate the valuation, market reaction, and potential conflicts of interest for deals that are announced close to the liquidation date.
- *Negotiations and process* - What was the process undertaken to identify potential target companies within specified industry or location specified in charter? Consider the background of the sponsors.
- *Conflicts of interest* - How are sponsors benefiting from the transaction compared to IPO shareholders? Potential conflicts could arise if a fairness opinion is issued by the insiders to qualify the deal rather than a third party or if management is encouraged to pay a higher price for the target because of an 80 percent rule (the charter requires that the fair market value of the target is at least equal to 80 percent of net assets of the SPAC). Also, there may be sense of urgency by the management team of the SPAC to close the deal since its charter typically requires a transaction to be completed within the 18-24-month timeframe.
- *Voting agreements* - Are the sponsors entering into any voting agreements/tender offers with shareholders who are likely to vote against the proposed merger or exercise conversion rights?


- *Governance* - What is the impact of having the SPAC CEO or founder on key committees following the proposed merger?

### Special Purpose Acquisition Corporations (SPACs) - Proposals for Extensions

 **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on SPAC extension proposals taking into account the length of the requested extension, the status of any pending transaction(s) or progression of the acquisition process, any added incentive for non-redeeming shareholders, and any prior extension requests.

- *Length of request:* Typically, extension requests range from two to six months, depending on the progression of the SPAC's acquisition process.
- *Pending transaction(s) or progression of the acquisition process:* Sometimes an initial business combination was already put to a shareholder vote, but, for varying reasons, the transaction could not be consummated by the termination date and the SPAC is requesting an extension. Other times, the SPAC has entered into a definitive transaction agreement, but needs additional time to consummate or hold the shareholder meeting.
- *Added incentive for non-redeeming shareholders:* Sometimes the SPAC sponsor (or other insiders) will contribute, typically as a loan to the company, additional funds that will be added to the redemption value of each public share as long as such shares are not redeemed in connection with the extension request. The purpose of the "equity kicker" is to incentivize shareholders to hold their shares through the end of the requested extension or until the time the transaction is put to a shareholder vote, rather than electing redemption at the extension proposal meeting.
- *Prior extension requests:* Some SPACs request additional time beyond the extension period sought in prior extension requests.

### Spin-offs

 **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on spin-offs, considering:

- Tax and regulatory advantages;
- Planned use of the sale proceeds;
- Valuation of spinoff;
- Fairness opinion;
- Benefits to the parent company;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Managerial incentives;
- Corporate governance changes;
- Changes in the capital structure.

### Value Maximization Shareholder Proposals

 **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals seeking to maximize shareholder value by:

- Hiring a financial advisor to explore strategic alternatives;
- Selling the company; or
- Liquidating the company and distributing the proceeds to shareholders.

These proposals should be evaluated based on the following factors:

- Prolonged poor performance with no turnaround in sight;
- Signs of entrenched board and management (such as the adoption of takeover defenses);
- Strategic plan in place for improving value;
- Likelihood of receiving reasonable value in a sale or dissolution; and
- The company actively exploring its strategic options, including retaining a financial advisor.

## 5. Compensation

### Executive Pay Evaluation

Underlying all evaluations are five global principles that most investors expect corporations to adhere to in designing and administering executive and director compensation programs:

1. Maintain appropriate pay-for-performance alignment, with emphasis on long-term shareholder value: This principle encompasses overall executive pay practices, which must be designed to attract, retain, and appropriately motivate the key employees who drive shareholder value creation over the long term. It will take into consideration, among other factors, the link between pay and performance; the mix between fixed and variable pay; performance goals; and equity-based plan costs;
2. Avoid arrangements that risk “pay for failure”: This principle addresses the appropriateness of long or indefinite contracts, excessive severance packages, and guaranteed compensation;
3. Maintain an independent and effective compensation committee: This principle promotes oversight of executive pay programs by directors with appropriate skills, knowledge, experience, and a sound process for compensation decision-making (e.g., including access to independent expertise and advice when needed);
4. Provide shareholders with clear, comprehensive compensation disclosures: This principle underscores the importance of informative and timely disclosures that enable shareholders to evaluate executive pay practices fully and fairly;
5. Avoid inappropriate pay to non-executive directors: This principle recognizes the interests of shareholders in ensuring that compensation to outside directors is reasonable and does not compromise their independence and ability to make appropriate judgments in overseeing managers’ pay and performance. At the market level, it may incorporate a variety of generally accepted best practices.

#### Advisory Votes on Executive Compensation—Management Proposals (Say-on-Pay)



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on ballot items related to executive pay and practices, as well as certain aspects of outside director compensation.

Vote against Advisory Votes on Executive Compensation (Say-on-Pay or “SOP”) if:

- There is an unmitigated misalignment between CEO pay and company performance (pay for performance);
- The company maintains significant problematic pay practices;
- The board exhibits a significant level of [poor communication and responsiveness](#) to shareholders.

Vote against or withhold from the members of the Compensation Committee and potentially the full board if:

- There is no SOP on the ballot, and an against vote on an SOP would otherwise be warranted due to pay-for-performance misalignment, problematic pay practices, or the lack of adequate responsiveness on compensation issues raised previously, or a combination thereof;
- The board fails to respond adequately to a previous SOP proposal that received less than 70 percent support of votes cast;
- The company has recently practiced or approved problematic pay practices, such as option repricing or option backdating; or
- The situation is egregious.

## Primary Evaluation Factors for Executive Pay

### Pay-for-Performance Evaluation

ISS annually conducts a pay-for-performance analysis to identify strong or satisfactory alignment between pay and performance over a sustained period. With respect to companies in the S&P1500, Russell 3000, or Russell 3000E Indices<sup>16</sup>, this analysis considers the following:

1. Peer Group<sup>17</sup> Alignment:
  - The degree of alignment between the company's annualized TSR rank and the CEO's annualized total pay rank within a peer group, each measured over a three-year period.
  - The rankings of CEO total pay and company financial performance within a peer group, each measured over a three-year period.
  - The multiple of the CEO's total pay relative to the peer group median in the most recent fiscal year.
2. Absolute Alignment<sup>18</sup> – the absolute alignment between the trend in CEO pay and company TSR over the prior five fiscal years – i.e., the difference between the trend in annual pay changes and the trend in annualized TSR during the period.

If the above analysis demonstrates significant unsatisfactory long-term pay-for-performance alignment or, in the case of companies outside the Russell indices, a misalignment between pay and performance is otherwise suggested, our analysis may include any of the following qualitative factors, as relevant to an evaluation of how various pay elements may work to encourage or to undermine long-term value creation and alignment with shareholder interests:

- The ratio of performance- to time-based incentive awards;
- The overall ratio of performance-based compensation to fixed or discretionary pay;
- The rigor of performance goals;
- The complexity and risks around pay program design;
- The transparency and clarity of disclosure;
- The company's peer group benchmarking practices;
- Financial/operational results, both absolute and relative to peers;
- Special circumstances related to, for example, a new CEO in the prior FY or anomalous equity grant practices (e.g., bi-annual awards);
- Realizable pay<sup>19</sup> compared to grant pay; and
- Any other factors deemed relevant.

### Problematic Pay Practices

The focus is on executive compensation practices that contravene the global pay principles, including:

- Problematic practices related to non-performance-based compensation elements;

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<sup>16</sup> The [Russell 3000E](#) Index includes approximately 4,000 of the largest U.S. equity securities.

<sup>17</sup> The revised peer group is generally comprised of 14-24 companies that are selected using market cap, revenue (or assets for certain financial firms), GICS industry group, and company's selected peers' GICS industry group, with size constraints, via a process designed to select peers that are comparable to the subject company in terms of revenue/assets and industry, and also within a market-cap bucket that is reflective of the company's market cap. For Oil, Gas & Consumable Fuels companies, market cap is the only size determinant.



<sup>18</sup> Only Russell 3000 Index companies are subject to the Absolute Alignment analysis.

<sup>19</sup> ISS research reports include realizable pay for S&P1500 companies.

- Incentives that may motivate excessive risk-taking or present a windfall risk; and
- Pay decisions that circumvent pay-for-performance, such as options backdating or waiving performance requirements.

### **Problematic Pay Practices related to Non-Performance-Based Compensation Elements**

Pay elements that are not directly based on performance are generally evaluated case-by-case considering the context of a company's overall pay program and demonstrated pay-for-performance philosophy. Please refer to ISS' [U.S. Compensation Policies FAQ](#) document for detail on specific pay practices that have been identified as potentially problematic and may lead to negative recommendations if they are deemed to be inappropriate or unjustified relative to executive pay best practices. The list below highlights the problematic practices that carry significant weight in this overall consideration and may result in adverse vote recommendations:

- Repricing or replacing of underwater stock options/SARs without prior shareholder approval (including cash buyouts and voluntary surrender of underwater options);
- Extraordinary perquisites or tax gross-ups;
- New or materially amended agreements that provide for:
  - Excessive termination or CIC severance payments (generally exceeding 3 times base salary and average/target/most recent bonus);
  - CIC severance payments without involuntary job loss or substantial diminution of duties ("single" or "modified single" triggers) or in connection with a problematic Good Reason definition;
  - CIC excise tax gross-up entitlements (including "modified" gross-ups);
  - Multi-year guaranteed awards that are not at risk due to rigorous performance conditions;
- Liberal CIC definition combined with any single-trigger CIC benefits;
- Insufficient executive compensation disclosure by externally-managed issuers (EMIs) such that a reasonable assessment of pay programs and practices applicable to the EMI's executives is not possible;
- Any other provision or practice deemed to be egregious and present a significant risk to investors.

### **Options Backdating**

The following factors should be examined case-by-case to allow for distinctions to be made between “sloppy” plan administration versus deliberate action or fraud:

- Reason and motive for the options backdating issue, such as inadvertent vs. deliberate grant date changes;
- Duration of options backdating;
- Size of restatement due to options backdating;
- Corrective actions taken by the board or compensation committee, such as canceling or re-pricing backdated options, the recouping of option gains on backdated grants; and
- Adoption of a grant policy that prohibits backdating and creates a fixed grant schedule or window period for equity grants in the future.

### **Compensation Committee Communications and Responsiveness**

Consider the following factors case-by-case when evaluating ballot items related to executive pay on the board's responsiveness to investor input and engagement on compensation issues:

- Failure to respond to majority-supported shareholder proposals on executive pay topics; or
- Failure to adequately respond to the company's previous say-on-pay proposal that received the support of less than 70 percent of votes cast, taking into account:

- Disclosure of engagement efforts with major institutional investors, including the frequency and timing of engagements and the company participants (including whether independent directors participated);

- Disclosure of the specific concerns voiced by dissenting shareholders that led to the say-on-pay opposition;
- Disclosure of specific and meaningful actions taken to address shareholders' concerns;
- Other recent compensation actions taken by the company;
- Whether the issues raised are recurring or isolated;
- The company's ownership structure; and
- Whether the support level was less than 50 percent, which would warrant the highest degree of responsiveness.

### **Frequency of Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation ("Say When on Pay")**



**General Recommendation:** Vote for annual advisory votes on compensation, which provide the most consistent and clear communication channel for shareholder concerns about companies' executive pay programs.

### **Voting on Golden Parachutes in an Acquisition, Merger, Consolidation, or Proposed Sale**



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on say on Golden Parachute proposals, including consideration of existing change-in-control arrangements maintained with named executive officers but also considering new or extended arrangements.

Features that may result in an “against” recommendation include one or more of the following, depending on the number, magnitude, and/or timing of issue(s):


- Single- or modified-single-trigger cash severance;
- Single-trigger acceleration of unvested equity awards;
- Full acceleration of equity awards granted shortly before the change in control;
- Acceleration of performance awards above the target level of performance without compelling rationale;
- Excessive cash severance (generally >3x base salary and bonus);
- Excise tax gross-ups triggered and payable;
- Excessive golden parachute payments (on an absolute basis or as a percentage of transaction equity value); or
- Recent amendments that incorporate any problematic features (such as those above) or recent actions (such as extraordinary equity grants) that may make packages so attractive as to influence merger agreements that may not be in the best interests of shareholders; or
- The company's assertion that a proposed transaction is conditioned on shareholder approval of the golden parachute advisory vote.

Recent amendment(s) that incorporate problematic features will tend to carry more weight on the overall analysis. However, the presence of multiple legacy problematic features will also be closely scrutinized.

In cases where the golden parachute vote is incorporated into a company's advisory vote on compensation (management say-on-pay), ISS will evaluate the say-on-pay proposal in accordance with these guidelines, which may give higher weight to that component of the overall evaluation.

## **Equity-Based and Other Incentive Plans**

Please refer to ISS' [U.S. Equity Compensation Plans FAQ](#) document for additional details on the Equity Plan Scorecard policy.

 **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on certain equity-based compensation plans<sup>20</sup> depending on a combination of certain plan features and equity grant practices, where positive factors may counterbalance negative factors, and vice versa, as evaluated using an "Equity Plan Scorecard" (EPSC) approach with three pillars:

- **Plan Cost:** The total estimated cost of the company's equity plans relative to industry/market cap peers, measured by the company's estimated Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT) in relation to peers and considering both:
  - SVT based on new shares requested plus shares remaining for future grants, plus outstanding unvested/unexercised grants; and
  - SVT based only on new shares requested plus shares remaining for future grants.
- **Plan Features:**
  - Quality of disclosure around vesting upon a change in control (CIC);
  - Discretionary vesting authority;
  - Liberal share recycling on various award types;
  - Lack of minimum vesting period for grants made under the plan;
  - Dividends payable prior to award vesting.
- **Grant Practices:**
  - The company's three-year burn rate relative to its industry/market cap peers;
  - Vesting requirements in CEO's recent equity grants (3-year look-back);
  - The estimated duration of the plan (based on the sum of shares remaining available and the new shares requested, divided by the average annual shares granted in the prior three years);
  - The proportion of the CEO's most recent equity grants/awards subject to performance conditions;
  - Whether the company maintains a sufficient claw-back policy;
  - Whether the company maintains sufficient post-exercise/vesting share-holding requirements.

Generally vote against the plan proposal if the combination of above factors indicates that the plan is not, overall, in shareholders' interests, or if any of the following egregious factors ("overriding factors") apply:

- Awards may vest in connection with a liberal change-of-control definition;
- The plan would permit repricing or cash buyout of underwater options without shareholder approval (either by expressly permitting it – for NYSE and Nasdaq listed companies – or by not prohibiting it when the company has a history of repricing – for non-listed companies);
- The plan is a vehicle for problematic pay practices or a significant pay-for-performance disconnect under certain circumstances;
- The plan is excessively dilutive to shareholders' holdings;
- The plan contains an evergreen (automatic share replenishment) feature; or
- Any other plan features are determined to have a significant negative impact on shareholder interests.

### Further Information on certain EPSC Factors:

#### Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT)

The cost of the equity plans is expressed as Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT), which is measured using a binomial option pricing model that assesses the amount of shareholders' equity flowing out of the company to employees and directors. SVT is expressed as both a dollar amount and as a percentage of market value, and includes the new

<sup>20</sup> Proposals evaluated under the EPSC policy generally include those to approve or amend (1) stock option plans for employees

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and/or employees and directors, (2) restricted stock plans for employees and/or employees and directors, and (3) omnibus stock incentive plans for employees and/or employees and directors; amended plans will be further evaluated case-by-case.

shares proposed, shares available under existing plans, and shares granted but unexercised (using two measures, in the case of plans subject to the Equity Plan Scorecard evaluation, as noted above). All award types are valued. For omnibus plans, unless limitations are placed on the most expensive types of awards (for example, full-value awards), the assumption is made that all awards to be granted will be the most expensive types.

For proposals that are not subject to the Equity Plan Scorecard evaluation, Shareholder Value Transfer is reasonable if it falls below a company-specific benchmark. The benchmark is determined as follows: The top quartile performers in each industry group (using the Global Industry Classification Standard: GICS) are identified. Benchmark SVT levels for each industry are established based on these top performers' historic SVT. Regression analyses are run on each industry group to identify the variables most strongly correlated to SVT. The benchmark industry SVT level is then adjusted upwards or downwards for the specific company by plugging the company-specific performance measures, size, and cash compensation into the industry cap equations to arrive at the company's benchmark.<sup>21</sup>

### Three-Year Burn Rate

For meetings held prior to February 1, 2023, burn-rate benchmarks (utilized in Equity Plan Scorecard evaluations) are calculated as the greater of: (1) the mean ( $\mu$ ) plus one standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ) of the company's GICS group segmented by S&P 500, Russell 3000 index (less the S&P500), and non-Russell 3000 index; and (2) two percent of weighted common shares outstanding. In addition, year-over-year burn-rate benchmark changes will be limited to a maximum of two (2) percentage points plus or minus the prior year's burn-rate benchmark. See the [U.S. Equity Compensation Plans FAQ](#) for the benchmarks.

For meetings held prior to February 1, 2023, a company's adjusted burn rate is calculated as follows:

Burn Rate = (# of appreciation awards granted + # of full value awards granted \* Volatility Multiplier) / Weighted average common shares outstanding

The Volatility Multiplier is used to provide more equivalent valuation between stock options and full value shares, based on the company's historical stock price volatility.

Effective for meetings held on or after February 1, 2023, a "Value-Adjusted Burn Rate" will instead be used for stock plan evaluations. Value-Adjusted Burn Rate benchmarks will be calculated as the greater of: (1) an industry-specific threshold based on three-year burn rates within the company's GICS group segmented by S&P 500, Russell 3000 index (less the S&P 500) and non-Russell 3000 index; and (2) a de minimis threshold established separately for each of the S&P 500, the Russell 3000 index less the S&P 500, and the non-Russell 3000 index. Year-over-year burn-rate benchmark changes will be limited to a predetermined range above or below the prior year's burn-rate benchmark.

The Value-Adjusted Burn Rate will be calculated as follows:

Value-Adjusted Burn Rate = ((# of options \* option's dollar value using a Black-Scholes model) + (# of full-value awards \* stock price)) / (Weighted average common shares \* stock price).

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<sup>21</sup> For plans evaluated under the Equity Plan Scorecard policy, the company's SVT benchmark is considered along with other factors.

**Egregious Factors****Liberal Change in Control Definition**

Generally vote against equity plans if the plan has a liberal definition of change in control and the equity awards could vest upon such liberal definition of change in control, even though an actual change in control may not occur. Examples of such a definition include, but are not limited to, announcement or commencement of a tender offer, provisions for acceleration upon a “potential” takeover, shareholder approval of a merger or other transactions, or similar language.

**Repricing Provisions**

Vote against plans that expressly permit the repricing or exchange of underwater stock options/stock appreciate rights (SARs) without prior shareholder approval. “Repricing” typically includes the ability to do any of the following:

- Amend the terms of outstanding options or SARs to reduce the exercise price of such outstanding options or SARs;
- Cancel outstanding options or SARs in exchange for options or SARs with an exercise price that is less than the exercise price of the original options or SARs;
- Cancel underwater options in exchange for stock awards; or
- Provide cash buyouts of underwater options.

While the above cover most types of repricing, ISS may view other provisions as akin to repricing depending on the facts and circumstances.

Also, vote against or withhold from members of the Compensation Committee who approved repricing (as defined above or otherwise determined by ISS), without prior shareholder approval, even if such repricings are allowed in their equity plan.

Vote against plans that do not expressly prohibit repricing or cash buyout of underwater options without shareholder approval if the company has a history of repricing/buyouts without shareholder approval, and the applicable listing standards would not preclude them from doing so.

**Problematic Pay Practices or Significant Pay-for-Performance Disconnect**

If the equity plan on the ballot is a vehicle for [problematic pay practices](#), vote against the plan.

ISS may recommend a vote against the equity plan if the plan is determined to be a vehicle for pay-for-performance misalignment. Considerations in voting against the equity plan may include, but are not limited to:

- Severity of the pay-for-performance misalignment;
- Whether problematic equity grant practices are driving the misalignment; and/or
- Whether equity plan awards have been heavily concentrated to the CEO and/or the other NEOs.

**Amending Cash and Equity Plans (including Approval for Tax Deductibility (162(m)))**

**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on amendments to cash and equity incentive plans.

Generally vote for proposals to amend executive cash, stock, or cash and stock incentive plans if the proposal:



- Addresses administrative features only; or

- Seeks approval for Section 162(m) purposes only, and the plan administering committee consists entirely of independent directors, per [ISS' Classification of Directors](#). Note that if the company is presenting the plan to shareholders for the first time for any reason (including after the company's initial public offering), or if the proposal is bundled with other material plan amendments, then the recommendation will be case-by-case (see below).

Vote against proposals to amend executive cash, stock, or cash and stock incentive plans if the proposal:

- Seeks approval for Section 162(m) purposes only, and the plan administering committee does not consist entirely of independent directors, per [ISS' Classification of Directors](#).

Vote case-by-case on all other proposals to amend cash incentive plans. This includes plans presented to shareholders for the first time after the company's IPO and/or proposals that bundle material amendment(s) other than those for Section 162(m) purposes.

Vote case-by-case on all other proposals to amend equity incentive plans, considering the following:

- If the proposal requests additional shares and/or the amendments include a term extension or addition of full value awards as an award type, the recommendation will be based on the Equity Plan Scorecard evaluation as well as an analysis of the overall impact of the amendments.
- If the plan is being presented to shareholders for the first time (including after the company's IPO), whether or not additional shares are being requested, the recommendation will be based on the Equity Plan Scorecard evaluation as well as an analysis of the overall impact of any amendments.
- If there is no request for additional shares and the amendments do not include a term extension or addition of full value awards as an award type, then the recommendation will be based entirely on an analysis of the overall impact of the amendments, and the EPSC evaluation will be shown only for informational purposes.

In the first two case-by-case evaluation scenarios, the EPSC evaluation/score is the more heavily weighted consideration.

### **Specific Treatment of Certain Award Types in Equity Plan Evaluations**

#### **Dividend Equivalent Rights**

Options that have Dividend Equivalent Rights (DERs) associated with them will have a higher calculated award value than those without DERs under the binomial model, based on the value of these dividend streams. The higher value will be applied to new shares, shares available under existing plans, and shares awarded but not exercised per the plan specifications. DERS transfer more shareholder equity to employees and non-employee directors and this cost should be captured.

#### **Operating Partnership (OP) Units in Equity Plan Analysis of Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)**

For Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), include the common shares issuable upon conversion of outstanding Operating Partnership (OP) units in the share count for the purposes of determining: (1) market capitalization in the Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT) analysis and (2) shares outstanding in the burn rate analysis.

### **Other Compensation Plans**

#### **401(k) Employee Benefit Plans**



**General Recommendation:** Vote for proposals to implement a 401(k) savings plan for employees.

**Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs)**

- **General Recommendation:** Vote for proposals to implement an ESOP or increase authorized shares for existing ESOPs, unless the number of shares allocated to the ESOP is excessive (more than five percent of outstanding shares).

**Employee Stock Purchase Plans—Qualified Plans**

- **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on qualified employee stock purchase plans. Vote for employee stock purchase plans where all of the following apply:

- Purchase price is at least 85 percent of fair market value;
- Offering period is 27 months or less; and
- The number of shares allocated to the plan is 10 percent or less of the outstanding shares.

Vote against qualified employee stock purchase plans where when the plan features do not meet all of the above criteria.

**Employee Stock Purchase Plans—Non-Qualified Plans**

- **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on nonqualified employee stock purchase plans. Vote for nonqualified employee stock purchase plans with all the following features:

- Broad-based participation;
- Limits on employee contribution, which may be a fixed dollar amount or expressed as a percent of base salary;
- Company matching contribution up to 25 percent of employee's contribution, which is effectively a discount of 20 percent from market value; and
- No discount on the stock price on the date of purchase when there is a company matching contribution.

Vote against nonqualified employee stock purchase plans when the plan features do not meet all of the above criteria. If the matching contribution or effective discount exceeds the above, ISS may evaluate the SVT cost of the plan as part of the assessment.

**Option Exchange Programs/Repricing Options**

- **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on management proposals seeking approval to exchange/reprice options taking into consideration:

- Historic trading patterns--the stock price should not be so volatile that the options are likely to be back "in-the-money" over the near term;
- Rationale for the re-pricing--was the stock price decline beyond management's control?;
- Is this a value-for-value exchange?;
- Are surrendered stock options added back to the plan reserve?;
- Timing--repricing should occur at least one year out from any precipitous drop in company's stock price;
- Option vesting--does the new option vest immediately or is there a black-out period?;
- Term of the option--the term should remain the same as that of the replaced option;
- Exercise price--should be set at fair market or a premium to market;
- Participants--executive officers and directors must be excluded.

If the surrendered options are added back to the equity plans for re-issuance, then also take into consideration the company's total cost of equity plans and its three-year average burn rate.

In addition to the above considerations, evaluate the intent, rationale, and timing of the repricing proposal. The proposal should clearly articulate why the board is choosing to conduct an exchange program at this point in time. Repricing underwater options after a recent precipitous drop in the company's stock price demonstrates poor timing and warrants additional scrutiny. Also, consider the terms of the surrendered options, such as the grant

date, exercise price and vesting schedule. Grant dates of surrendered options should be far enough back (two to

three years) so as not to suggest that repricings are being done to take advantage of short-term downward price movements. Similarly, the exercise price of surrendered options should be above the 52-week high for the stock price.

Vote for shareholder proposals to put option repricings to a shareholder vote.

### **Stock Plans in Lieu of Cash**



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on plans that provide participants with the option of taking all or a portion of their cash compensation in the form of stock.

Vote for non-employee director-only equity plans that provide a dollar-for-dollar cash-for-stock exchange.

Vote case-by-case on plans which do not provide a dollar-for-dollar cash for stock exchange. In cases where the exchange is not dollar-for-dollar, the request for new or additional shares for such equity program will be considered using the binomial option pricing model. In an effort to capture the total cost of total compensation, ISS will not make any adjustments to carve out the in-lieu-of cash compensation.

### **Transfer Stock Option (TSO) Programs**



**General Recommendation:** One-time Transfers: Vote against or withhold from compensation committee members if they fail to submit one-time transfers to shareholders for approval.

Vote case-by-case on one-time transfers. Vote for if:

- Executive officers and non-employee directors are excluded from participating;
- Stock options are purchased by third-party financial institutions at a discount to their fair value using option pricing models such as Black-Scholes or a Binomial Option Valuation or other appropriate financial models; and
- There is a two-year minimum holding period for sale proceeds (cash or stock) for all participants.

Additionally, management should provide a clear explanation of why options are being transferred to a third-party institution and whether the events leading up to a decline in stock price were beyond management's control. A review of the company's historic stock price volatility should indicate if the options are likely to be back "in-the-money" over the near term.

Ongoing TSO program: Vote against equity plan proposals if the details of ongoing TSO programs are not provided to shareholders. Since TSOs will be one of the award types under a stock plan, the ongoing TSO program, structure, and mechanics must be disclosed to shareholders. The specific criteria to be considered in evaluating these proposals include, but not limited to, the following:

- Eligibility;
- Vesting;
- Bid-price;
- Term of options;
- Cost of the program and impact of the TSOs on company's total option expense; and
- Option repricing policy.

Amendments to existing plans that allow for introduction of transferability of stock options should make clear that only options granted post-amendment shall be transferable.

## Director Compensation

### Shareholder Ratification of Director Pay Programs



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on management proposals seeking ratification of non-employee director compensation, based on the following factors:

- If the equity plan under which non-employee director grants are made is on the ballot, whether or not it warrants support; and
- An assessment of the following qualitative factors:
  - The relative magnitude of director compensation as compared to companies of a similar profile;
  - The presence of problematic pay practices relating to director compensation;
  - Director stock ownership guidelines and holding requirements;
  - Equity award vesting schedules;
  - The mix of cash and equity-based compensation;
  - Meaningful limits on director compensation;
  - The availability of retirement benefits or perquisites; and
  - The quality of disclosure surrounding director compensation.

### Equity Plans for Non-Employee Directors



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on compensation plans for non-employee directors, based on:

- The total estimated cost of the company's equity plans relative to industry/market cap peers, measured by the company's estimated Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT) based on new shares requested plus shares remaining for future grants, plus outstanding unvested/unexercised grants;
- The company's three-year burn rate relative to its industry/market cap peers (in certain circumstances); and
- The presence of any egregious plan features (such as an option repricing provision or liberal CIC vesting risk).

On occasion, non-employee director stock plans will exceed the plan cost or burn-rate benchmarks when combined with employee or executive stock plans. In such cases, vote case-by-case on the plan taking into consideration the following qualitative factors:

- The relative magnitude of director compensation as compared to companies of a similar profile;
- The presence of problematic pay practices relating to director compensation;
- Director stock ownership guidelines and holding requirements;
- Equity award vesting schedules;
- The mix of cash and equity-based compensation;
- Meaningful limits on director compensation;
- The availability of retirement benefits or perquisites; and
- The quality of disclosure surrounding director compensation.

### Non-Employee Director Retirement Plans



**General Recommendation:** Vote against retirement plans for non-employee directors. Vote for shareholder proposals to eliminate retirement plans for non-employee directors.

## Shareholder Proposals on Compensation

### Bonus Banking/Bonus Banking “Plus”

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals seeking deferral of a portion of annual bonus pay, with ultimate payout linked to sustained results for the performance metrics on which the bonus was earned (whether for the named executive officers or a wider group of employees), taking into account the following factors:

- The company’s past practices regarding equity and cash compensation;
- Whether the company has a holding period or stock ownership requirements in place, such as a meaningful retention ratio (at least 50 percent for full tenure); and
- Whether the company has a rigorous claw-back policy in place.

### Compensation Consultants—Disclosure of Board or Company’s Utilization

➤ **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for shareholder proposals seeking disclosure regarding the company, board, or compensation committee’s use of compensation consultants, such as company name, business relationship(s), and fees paid.

### Disclosure/Setting Levels or Types of Compensation for Executives and Directors

➤ **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for shareholder proposals seeking additional disclosure of executive and director pay information, provided the information requested is relevant to shareholders' needs, would not put the company at a competitive disadvantage relative to its industry, and is not unduly burdensome to the company.

Generally vote against shareholder proposals seeking to set absolute levels on compensation or otherwise dictate the amount or form of compensation (such as types of compensation elements or specific metrics) to be used for executive or directors.

Generally vote against shareholder proposals that mandate a minimum amount of stock that directors must own in order to qualify as a director or to remain on the board.

Vote case-by-case on all other shareholder proposals regarding executive and director pay, taking into account relevant factors, including but not limited to: company performance, pay level and design versus peers, history of compensation concerns or pay-for-performance disconnect, and/or the scope and prescriptive nature of the proposal.

### Golden Coffins/Executive Death Benefits

➤ **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals calling for companies to adopt a policy of obtaining shareholder approval for any future agreements and corporate policies that could oblige the company to make payments or awards following the death of a senior executive in the form of unearned salary or bonuses, accelerated vesting or the continuation in force of unvested equity grants, perquisites and other payments or awards made in lieu of compensation. This would not apply to any benefit programs or equity plan proposals for which the broad-based employee population is eligible.

### Hold Equity Past Retirement or for a Significant Period of Time

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals asking companies to adopt policies requiring senior executive officers to retain a portion of net shares acquired through compensation plans. The following factors will be taken into account:

- The percentage/ratio of net shares required to be retained;
- The time period required to retain the shares;

- Whether the company has equity retention, holding period, and/or stock ownership requirements in place and the robustness of such requirements;



- Whether the company has any other policies aimed at mitigating risk taking by executives;
- Executives' actual stock ownership and the degree to which it meets or exceeds the proponent's suggested holding period/retention ratio or the company's existing requirements; and
- Problematic pay practices, current and past, which may demonstrate a short-term versus long-term focus.

### Pay Disparity



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals calling for an analysis of the pay disparity between corporate executives and other non-executive employees. The following factors will be considered:

- The company's current level of disclosure of its executive compensation setting process, including how the company considers pay disparity;
- If any problematic pay practices or pay-for-performance concerns have been identified at the company; and
- The level of shareholder support for the company's pay programs.

Generally vote against proposals calling for the company to use the pay disparity analysis or pay ratio in a specific way to set or limit executive pay.

### Pay for Performance/Performance-Based Awards



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals requesting that a significant amount of future long-term incentive compensation awarded to senior executives shall be performance-based and requesting that the board adopt and disclose challenging performance metrics to shareholders, based on the following analytical steps:

- First, vote for shareholder proposals advocating the use of performance-based equity awards, such as performance contingent options or restricted stock, indexed options, or premium-priced options, unless the proposal is overly restrictive or if the company has demonstrated that it is using a "substantial" portion of performance-based awards for its top executives. Standard stock options and performance-accelerated awards do not meet the criteria to be considered as performance-based awards. Further, premium-priced options should have a meaningful premium to be considered performance-based awards.
- Second, assess the rigor of the company's performance-based equity program. If the bar set for the performance-based program is too low based on the company's historical or peer group comparison, generally vote for the proposal. Furthermore, if target performance results in an above target payout, vote for the shareholder proposal due to program's poor design. If the company does not disclose the performance metric of the performance-based equity program, vote for the shareholder proposal regardless of the outcome of the first step to the test.

In general, vote for the shareholder proposal if the company does not meet both of the above two steps.

### Pay for Superior Performance



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals that request the board establish a pay-for-superior performance standard in the company's executive compensation plan for senior executives. These proposals generally include the following principles:


- Set compensation targets for the plan's annual and long-term incentive pay components at or below the peer group median;
- Deliver a majority of the plan's target long-term compensation through performance-vested, not simply time-vested, equity awards;
- Provide the strategic rationale and relative weightings of the financial and non-financial performance metrics or criteria used in the annual and performance-vested long-term incentive components of the plan;

- Establish performance targets for each plan financial metric relative to the performance of the company's peer companies;
- Limit payment under the annual and performance-vested long-term incentive components of the plan to when the company's performance on its selected financial performance metrics exceeds peer group median performance.

Consider the following factors in evaluating this proposal:


- What aspects of the company's annual and long-term equity incentive programs are performance driven?
- If the annual and long-term equity incentive programs are performance driven, are the performance criteria and hurdle rates disclosed to shareholders or are they benchmarked against a disclosed peer group?
- Can shareholders assess the correlation between pay and performance based on the current disclosure?
- What type of industry and stage of business cycle does the company belong to?

### **Pre-Arranged Trading Plans (10b5-1 Plans)**


 **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for shareholder proposals calling for the addition of certain safeguards in prearranged trading plans (10b5-1 plans) for executives. Safeguards may include:

- Adoption, amendment, or termination of a 10b5-1 Plan must be disclosed in a Form 8-K;
- Amendment or early termination of a 10b5-1 Plan allowed only under extraordinary circumstances, as determined by the board;
- Request that a certain number of days that must elapse between adoption or amendment of a 10b5-1 Plan and initial trading under the plan;
- Reports on Form 4 must identify transactions made pursuant to a 10b5-1 Plan;
- An executive may not trade in company stock outside the 10b5-1 Plan;
- Trades under a 10b5-1 Plan must be handled by a broker who does not handle other securities transactions for the executive.

### **Prohibit Outside CEOs from Serving on Compensation Committees**

 **General Recommendation:** Generally vote against proposals seeking a policy to prohibit any outside CEO from serving on a company's compensation committee, unless the company has demonstrated problematic pay practices that raise concerns about the performance and composition of the committee.

### **Recoupment of Incentive or Stock Compensation in Specified Circumstances**

 **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to recoup incentive cash or stock compensation made to senior executives if it is later determined that the figures upon which incentive compensation is earned turn out to have been in error, or if the senior executive has breached company policy or has engaged in misconduct that may be significantly detrimental to the company's financial position or reputation, or if the senior executive failed to manage or monitor risks that subsequently led to significant financial or reputational harm to the company. Many companies have adopted policies that permit recoupment in cases where an executive's fraud, misconduct, or negligence significantly contributed to a restatement of financial results that led to the awarding of unearned incentive compensation. However, such policies may be narrow given that not all misconduct or negligence may result in significant financial restatements. Misconduct, negligence, or lack of sufficient oversight by senior executives may lead to significant financial loss or reputational damage that may have long-lasting impact.


In considering whether to support such shareholder proposals, ISS will take into consideration the following factors:

- If the company has adopted a formal recoupment policy;

- The rigor of the recoupment policy focusing on how and under what circumstances the company may recoup incentive or stock compensation;

- Whether the company has chronic restatement history or material financial problems;
- Whether the company's policy substantially addresses the concerns raised by the proponent;
- Disclosure of recoupment of incentive or stock compensation from senior executives or lack thereof; or
- Any other relevant factors.


### **Severance Agreements for Executives/Golden Parachutes**

-  **General Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals requiring that golden parachutes or executive severance agreements be submitted for shareholder ratification, unless the proposal requires shareholder approval *prior* to entering into employment contracts.

Vote case-by-case on proposals to ratify or cancel golden parachutes. An acceptable parachute should include, but is not limited to, the following:


- The triggering mechanism should be beyond the control of management;
- The amount should not exceed three times base amount (defined as the average annual taxable W-2 compensation during the five years prior to the year in which the change of control occurs);
- Change-in-control payments should be double-triggered, i.e., (1) after a change in control has taken place, and (2) termination of the executive as a result of the change in control. Change in control is defined as a change in the company ownership structure.

### **Share Buyback Impact on Incentive Program Metrics**

-  **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting the company exclude the impact of share buybacks from the calculation of incentive program metrics, considering the following factors:


- The frequency and timing of the company's share buybacks;
- The use of per-share metrics in incentive plans;
- The effect of recent buybacks on incentive metric results and payouts; and
- Whether there is any indication of metric result manipulation.

### **Supplemental Executive Retirement Plans (SERPs)**


-  **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting to put extraordinary benefits contained in SERP agreements to a shareholder vote unless the company's executive pension plans do not contain excessive benefits beyond what is offered under employee-wide plans.

Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting to limit the executive benefits provided under the company's supplemental executive retirement plan (SERP) by limiting covered compensation to a senior executive's annual salary or those pay elements covered for the general employee population.

### **Tax Gross-Up Proposals**

-  **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals calling for companies to adopt a policy of not providing tax gross-up payments to executives, except in situations where gross-ups are provided pursuant to a plan, policy, or arrangement applicable to management employees of the company, such as a relocation or expatriate tax equalization policy.

### **Termination of Employment Prior to Severance Payment/Eliminating Accelerated Vesting of Unvested Equity**

-  **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals seeking a policy requiring termination of employment prior to severance payment and/or eliminating accelerated vesting of unvested equity.

The following factors will be considered:

- The company's current treatment of equity upon employment termination and/or in change-in-control situations (i.e., vesting is double triggered and/or pro rata, does it allow for the assumption of equity by acquiring company, the treatment of performance shares, etc.);
- Current employment agreements, including potential poor pay practices such as gross-ups embedded in those agreements.

Generally vote for proposals seeking a policy that prohibits automatic acceleration of the vesting of equity awards to senior executives upon a voluntary termination of employment or in the event of a change in control (except for pro rata vesting considering the time elapsed and attainment of any related performance goals between the award date and the change in control).

## 6. Routine/Miscellaneous

### Adjourn Meeting

- **General Recommendation:** Generally vote against proposals to provide management with the authority to adjourn an annual or special meeting absent compelling reasons to support the proposal.

Vote for proposals that relate specifically to soliciting votes for a merger or transaction if supporting that merger or transaction. Vote against proposals if the wording is too vague or if the proposal includes "other business."

### Amend Quorum Requirements

- **General Recommendation:** Vote against proposals to reduce quorum requirements for shareholder meetings below a majority of the shares outstanding unless there are compelling reasons to support the proposal.

### Amend Minor Bylaws

- **General Recommendation:** Vote for bylaw or charter changes that are of a housekeeping nature (updates or corrections).

### Change Company Name

- **General Recommendation:** Vote for proposals to change the corporate name unless there is compelling evidence that the change would adversely impact shareholder value.

### Change Date, Time, or Location of Annual Meeting

- **General Recommendation:** Vote for management proposals to change the date, time, or location of the annual meeting unless the proposed change is unreasonable.

Vote against shareholder proposals to change the date, time, or location of the annual meeting unless the current scheduling or location is unreasonable.


### Other Business

- **General Recommendation:** Vote against proposals to approve other business when it appears as a voting item.

## 7. Social and Environmental Issues


### Global Approach

Issues covered under the policy include a wide range of topics, including consumer and product safety, environment and energy, labor standards and human rights, workplace and board diversity, and corporate political issues. While a variety of factors goes into each analysis, the overall principle guiding all vote recommendations focuses on how the proposal may enhance or protect shareholder value in either the short or long term.

 **General Recommendation:** Generally vote case-by-case, examining primarily whether implementation of the proposal is likely to enhance or protect shareholder value. The following factors will be considered:


- If the issues presented in the proposal are more appropriately or effectively dealt with through legislation or government regulation;
- If the company has already responded in an appropriate and sufficient manner to the issue(s) raised in the proposal;
- Whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive;
- The company's approach compared with any industry standard practices for addressing the issue(s) raised by the proposal;
- Whether there are significant controversies, fines, penalties, or litigation associated with the company's environmental or social practices;
- If the proposal requests increased disclosure or greater transparency, whether reasonable and sufficient information is currently available to shareholders from the company or from other publicly available sources; and
- If the proposal requests increased disclosure or greater transparency, whether implementation would reveal proprietary or confidential information that could place the company at a competitive disadvantage.

### Endorsement of Principles

 **General Recommendation:** Generally vote against proposals seeking a company's endorsement of principles that support a particular public policy position. Endorsing a set of principles may require a company to take a stand on an issue that is beyond its own control and may limit its flexibility with respect to future developments. Management and the board should be afforded the flexibility to make decisions on specific public policy positions based on their own assessment of the most beneficial strategies for the company.

### Animal Welfare

#### Animal Welfare Policies

 **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals seeking a report on a company's animal welfare standards, or animal welfare-related risks, unless:

- The company has already published a set of animal welfare standards and monitors compliance;
- The company's standards are comparable to industry peers; and
- There are no recent significant fines, litigation, or controversies related to the company's and/or its suppliers' treatment of animals.



### Animal Testing

➤ **General Recommendation:** Generally vote against proposals to phase out the use of animals in product testing, unless:

- The company is conducting animal testing programs that are unnecessary or not required by regulation;
- The company is conducting animal testing when suitable alternatives are commonly accepted and used by industry peers; or
- There are recent, significant fines or litigation related to the company's treatment of animals.

### Animal Slaughter

➤ **General Recommendation:** Generally vote against proposals requesting the implementation of Controlled Atmosphere Killing (CAK) methods at company and/or supplier operations unless such methods are required by legislation or generally accepted as the industry standard.

Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting a report on the feasibility of implementing CAK methods at company and/or supplier operations considering the availability of existing research conducted by the company or industry groups on this topic and any fines or litigation related to current animal processing procedures at the company.

## Consumer Issues

### Genetically Modified Ingredients

➤ **General Recommendation:** Generally vote against proposals requesting that a company voluntarily label genetically engineered (GE) ingredients in its products. The labeling of products with GE ingredients is best left to the appropriate regulatory authorities.

Vote case-by-case on proposals asking for a report on the feasibility of labeling products containing GE ingredients, taking into account:

- The potential impact of such labeling on the company's business;
- The quality of the company's disclosure on GE product labeling, related voluntary initiatives, and how this disclosure compares with industry peer disclosure; and
- Company's current disclosure on the feasibility of GE product labeling.

Generally vote against proposals seeking a report on the social, health, and environmental effects of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Studies of this sort are better undertaken by regulators and the scientific community.

Generally vote against proposals to eliminate GE ingredients from the company's products, or proposals asking for reports outlining the steps necessary to eliminate GE ingredients from the company's products. Such decisions are more appropriately made by management with consideration of current regulations.

### Reports on Potentially Controversial Business/Financial Practices

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on requests for reports on a company's potentially controversial business or financial practices or products, taking into account:

- Whether the company has adequately disclosed mechanisms in place to prevent abuses;
- Whether the company has adequately disclosed the financial risks of the products/practices in question;
- Whether the company has been subject to violations of related laws or serious controversies; and
- Peer companies' policies/practices in this area.

**Pharmaceutical Pricing, Access to Medicines, and Prescription Drug Reimportation**

**General Recommendation:** Generally vote against proposals requesting that companies implement specific price restraints on pharmaceutical products unless the company fails to adhere to legislative guidelines or industry norms in its product pricing practices.

Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting that a company report on its product pricing or access to medicine policies, considering:

- The potential for reputational, market, and regulatory risk exposure;
- Existing disclosure of relevant policies;
- Deviation from established industry norms;
- Relevant company initiatives to provide research and/or products to disadvantaged consumers;
- Whether the proposal focuses on specific products or geographic regions;
- The potential burden and scope of the requested report;
- Recent significant controversies, litigation, or fines at the company.

Generally vote for proposals requesting that a company report on the financial and legal impact of its prescription drug reimportation policies unless such information is already publicly disclosed.

Generally vote against proposals requesting that companies adopt specific policies to encourage or constrain prescription drug reimportation. Such matters are more appropriately the province of legislative activity and may place the company at a competitive disadvantage relative to its peers.

**Product Safety and Toxic/Hazardous Materials**

**General Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals requesting that a company report on its policies, initiatives/procedures, and oversight mechanisms related to toxic/hazardous materials or product safety in its supply chain, unless:

- The company already discloses similar information through existing reports such as a supplier code of conduct and/or a sustainability report;
- The company has formally committed to the implementation of a toxic/hazardous materials and/or product safety and supply chain reporting and monitoring program based on industry norms or similar standards within a specified time frame; and
- The company has not been recently involved in relevant significant controversies, fines, or litigation.

Vote case-by-case on resolutions requesting that companies develop a feasibility assessment to phase-out of certain toxic/hazardous materials, or evaluate and disclose the potential financial and legal risks associated with utilizing certain materials, considering:

- The company's current level of disclosure regarding its product safety policies, initiatives, and oversight mechanisms;
- Current regulations in the markets in which the company operates; and
- Recent significant controversies, litigation, or fines stemming from toxic/hazardous materials at the company.

Generally vote against resolutions requiring that a company reformulate its products.

**Tobacco-Related Proposals**

**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on resolutions regarding the advertisement of tobacco products, considering:

- Recent related fines, controversies, or significant litigation;
- Whether the company complies with relevant laws and regulations on the marketing of tobacco;

- Whether the company's advertising restrictions deviate from those of industry peers;
- Whether the company entered into the Master Settlement Agreement, which restricts marketing of tobacco to youth; and
- Whether restrictions on marketing to youth extend to foreign countries.

Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding second-hand smoke, considering;

- Whether the company complies with all laws and regulations;
- The degree that voluntary restrictions beyond those mandated by law might hurt the company's competitiveness; and
- The risk of any health-related liabilities.

Generally vote against resolutions to cease production of tobacco-related products, to avoid selling products to tobacco companies, to spin-off tobacco-related businesses, or prohibit investment in tobacco equities. Such business decisions are better left to company management or portfolio managers.

Generally vote against proposals regarding tobacco product warnings. Such decisions are better left to public health authorities.

## Climate Change

### Say on Climate (SoC) Management Proposals



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on management proposals that request shareholders to approve the company's climate transition action plan<sup>22</sup>, taking into account the completeness and rigor of the plan. Information that will be considered where available includes the following:

- The extent to which the company's climate related disclosures are in line with TCFD recommendations and meet other market standards;
- Disclosure of its operational and supply chain GHG emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3);
- The completeness and rigor of company's short-, medium-, and long-term targets for reducing operational and supply chain GHG emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3 if relevant);
- Whether the company has sought and received third-party approval that its targets are science-based;
- Whether the company has made a commitment to be "net zero" for operational and supply chain emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3) by 2050;
- Whether the company discloses a commitment to report on the implementation of its plan in subsequent years;
- Whether the company's climate data has received third-party assurance;
- Disclosure of how the company's lobbying activities and its capital expenditures align with company strategy;
- Whether there are specific industry decarbonization challenges; and
- The company's related commitment, disclosure, and performance compared to its industry peers.

### Say on Climate (SoC) Shareholder Proposals



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals that request the company to disclose a report providing its GHG emissions levels and reduction targets and/or its upcoming/approved climate transition action plan and provide shareholders the opportunity to express approval or disapproval of its GHG emissions reduction plan, taking into account information such as the following:

<sup>22</sup> Variations of this request also include climate transition related ambitions, or commitment to reporting on the implementation of a climate plan.

- The completeness and rigor of the company's climate-related disclosure;
- The company's actual GHG emissions performance;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent, significant violations, fines, litigation, or controversy related to its GHG emissions; and
- Whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive.

### Climate Change/Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions



**General Recommendation:** Generally vote for resolutions requesting that a company disclose information on the financial, physical, or regulatory risks it faces related to climate change on its operations and investments or on how the company identifies, measures, and manages such risks, considering:

- Whether the company already provides current, publicly-available information on the impact that climate change may have on the company as well as associated company policies and procedures to address related risks and/or opportunities;
- The company's level of disclosure compared to industry peers; and
- Whether there are significant controversies, fines, penalties, or litigation associated with the company's climate change-related performance.

Generally vote for proposals requesting a report on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from company operations and/or products and operations, unless:

- The company already discloses current, publicly-available information on the impacts that GHG emissions may have on the company as well as associated company policies and procedures to address related risks and/or opportunities;
- The company's level of disclosure is comparable to that of industry peers; and
- There are no significant, controversies, fines, penalties, or litigation associated with the company's GHG emissions.

Vote case-by-case on proposals that call for the adoption of GHG reduction goals from products and operations, taking into account:

- Whether the company provides disclosure of year-over-year GHG emissions performance data;
- Whether company disclosure lags behind industry peers;
- The company's actual GHG emissions performance;
- The company's current GHG emission policies, oversight mechanisms, and related initiatives; and
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent, significant violations, fines, litigation, or controversy related to GHG emissions.


### Energy Efficiency



**General Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals requesting that a company report on its energy efficiency policies, unless:

- The company complies with applicable energy efficiency regulations and laws, and discloses its participation in energy efficiency policies and programs, including disclosure of benchmark data, targets, and performance measures; or
- The proponent requests adoption of specific energy efficiency goals within specific timelines.

### Renewable Energy

-  **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for requests for reports on the feasibility of developing renewable energy resources unless the report would be duplicative of existing disclosure or irrelevant to the company's line of business.


Generally vote against proposals requesting that the company invest in renewable energy resources. Such decisions are best left to management's evaluation of the feasibility and financial impact that such programs may have on the company.

Generally vote against proposals that call for the adoption of renewable energy goals, taking into account:

- The scope and structure of the proposal;
- The company's current level of disclosure on renewable energy use and GHG emissions; and
- The company's disclosure of policies, practices, and oversight implemented to manage GHG emissions and mitigate climate change risks.

## Diversity

### Board Diversity


-  **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for requests for reports on a company's efforts to diversify the board, unless:

- The gender and racial minority representation of the company's board is reasonably inclusive in relation to companies of similar size and business; and
- The board already reports on its nominating procedures and gender and racial minority initiatives on the board and within the company.

Vote case-by-case on proposals asking a company to increase the gender and racial minority representation on its board, taking into account:

- The degree of existing gender and racial minority diversity on the company's board and among its executive officers;
- The level of gender and racial minority representation that exists at the company's industry peers;
- The company's established process for addressing gender and racial minority board representation;
- Whether the proposal includes an overly prescriptive request to amend nominating committee charter language;
- The independence of the company's nominating committee;
- Whether the company uses an outside search firm to identify potential director nominees; and
- Whether the company has had recent controversies, fines, or litigation regarding equal employment practices.

### Equality of Opportunity

-  **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals requesting a company disclose its diversity policies or initiatives, or proposals requesting disclosure of a company's comprehensive workforce diversity data, including requests for EEO-1 data, unless:

- The company publicly discloses equal opportunity policies and initiatives in a comprehensive manner;
- The company already publicly discloses comprehensive workforce diversity data; and
- The company has no recent significant EEO-related violations or litigation.

Generally vote against proposals seeking information on the diversity efforts of suppliers and service providers.

Such requests may pose a significant burden on the company.



**Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation, and Domestic Partner Benefits**

- **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals seeking to amend a company's EEO statement or diversity policies to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity, unless the change would be unduly burdensome.

Generally vote against proposals to extend company benefits to, or eliminate benefits from, domestic partners. Decisions regarding benefits should be left to the discretion of the company.

**Gender, Race/Ethnicity Pay Gap**

- **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on requests for reports on a company's pay data by gender or race/ethnicity, or a report on a company's policies and goals to reduce any gender or race/ethnicity pay gaps, taking into account:

- The company's current policies and disclosure related to both its diversity and inclusion policies and practices and its compensation philosophy on fair and equitable compensation practices;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent controversy, litigation, or regulatory actions related to gender, race, or ethnicity pay gap issues;
- The company's disclosure regarding gender, race, or ethnicity pay gap policies or initiatives compared to its industry peers; and
- Local laws regarding categorization of race and/or ethnicity and definitions of ethnic and/or racial minorities.

**Racial Equity and/or Civil Rights Audit Guidelines**

- **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals asking a company to conduct an independent racial equity and/or civil rights audit, taking into account:

- The company's established process or framework for addressing racial inequity and discrimination internally;
- Whether the company has issued a public statement related to its racial justice efforts in recent years, or has committed to internal policy review;
- Whether the company has engaged with impacted communities, stakeholders, and civil rights experts;
- The company's track record in recent years of racial justice measures and outreach externally;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent controversy, litigation, or regulatory actions related to racial inequity or discrimination; and
- Whether the company's actions are aligned with market norms on civil rights, and racial or ethnic diversity.

## Environment and Sustainability

**Facility and Workplace Safety**

- **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on requests for workplace safety reports, including reports on accident risk reduction efforts, taking into account:

- The company's current level of disclosure of its workplace health and safety performance data, health and safety management policies, initiatives, and oversight mechanisms;
- The nature of the company's business, specifically regarding company and employee exposure to health and safety risks;
- Recent significant controversies, fines, or violations related to workplace health and safety; and
- The company's workplace health and safety performance relative to industry peers.

Vote case-by-case on resolutions requesting that a company report on safety and/or security risks associated with its operations and/or facilities, considering:

- The company's compliance with applicable regulations and guidelines;
- The company's current level of disclosure regarding its security and safety policies, procedures, and compliance monitoring; and
- The existence of recent, significant violations, fines, or controversy regarding the safety and security of the company's operations and/or facilities.

### **General Environmental Proposals and Community Impact Assessments**



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on requests for reports on policies and/or the potential (community) social and/or environmental impact of company operations, considering:

- Current disclosure of applicable policies and risk assessment report(s) and risk management procedures;
- The impact of regulatory non-compliance, litigation, remediation, or reputational loss that may be associated with failure to manage the company's operations in question, including the management of relevant community and stakeholder relations;
- The nature, purpose, and scope of the company's operations in the specific region(s);
- The degree to which company policies and procedures are consistent with industry norms; and
- The scope of the resolution.

### **Hydraulic Fracturing**



**General Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals requesting greater disclosure of a company's (natural gas) hydraulic fracturing operations, including measures the company has taken to manage and mitigate the potential community and environmental impacts of those operations, considering:

- The company's current level of disclosure of relevant policies and oversight mechanisms;
- The company's current level of such disclosure relative to its industry peers;
- Potential relevant local, state, or national regulatory developments; and
- Controversies, fines, or litigation related to the company's hydraulic fracturing operations.

### **Operations in Protected Areas**



**General Recommendation:** Generally vote for requests for reports on potential environmental damage as a result of company operations in protected regions, unless:

- Operations in the specified regions are not permitted by current laws or regulations;
- The company does not currently have operations or plans to develop operations in these protected regions; or
- The company's disclosure of its operations and environmental policies in these regions is comparable to industry peers.

### **Recycling**



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to report on an existing recycling program, or adopt a new recycling program, taking into account:

- The nature of the company's business;
- The current level of disclosure of the company's existing related programs;
- The timetable and methods of program implementation prescribed by the proposal;
- The company's ability to address the issues raised in the proposal; and

- How the company's recycling programs compare to similar programs of its industry peers.

### Sustainability Reporting

➤ **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals requesting that a company report on its policies, initiatives, and oversight mechanisms related to social, economic, and environmental sustainability, unless:

- The company already discloses similar information through existing reports or policies such as an environment, health, and safety (EHS) report; a comprehensive code of corporate conduct; and/or a diversity report; or
- The company has formally committed to the implementation of a reporting program based on Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) guidelines or a similar standard within a specified time frame.

### Water Issues

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting a company report on, or adopt a new policy on, water-related risks and concerns, taking into account:

- The company's current disclosure of relevant policies, initiatives, oversight mechanisms, and water usage metrics;
- Whether or not the company's existing water-related policies and practices are consistent with relevant internationally recognized standards and national/local regulations;
- The potential financial impact or risk to the company associated with water-related concerns or issues; and
- Recent, significant company controversies, fines, or litigation regarding water use by the company and its suppliers.

## General Corporate Issues

### Charitable Contributions

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote against proposals restricting a company from making charitable contributions. Charitable contributions are generally useful for assisting worthwhile causes and for creating goodwill in the community. In the absence of bad faith, self-dealing, or gross negligence, management should determine which, and if, contributions are in the best interests of the company.

### Data Security, Privacy, and Internet Issues

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting the disclosure or implementation of data security, privacy, or information access and management policies and procedures, considering:

- The level of disclosure of company policies and procedures relating to data security, privacy, freedom of speech, information access and management, and Internet censorship;
- Engagement in dialogue with governments or relevant groups with respect to data security, privacy, or the free flow of information on the Internet;
- The scope of business involvement and of investment in countries whose governments censor or monitor the Internet and other telecommunications;
- Applicable market-specific laws or regulations that may be imposed on the company; and
- Controversies, fines, or litigation related to data security, privacy, freedom of speech, or Internet censorship.

### Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Compensation-Related Proposals

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to link, or report on linking, executive compensation to sustainability (environmental and social) criteria, considering:

- The scope and prescriptive nature of the proposal;
- Whether the company has significant and/or persistent controversies or regulatory violations regarding social and/or environmental issues;
- Whether the company has management systems and oversight mechanisms in place regarding its social and

environmental performance;

- The degree to which industry peers have incorporated similar non-financial performance criteria in their executive compensation practices; and
- The company's current level of disclosure regarding its environmental and social performance.

## Human Rights, Human Capital Management, and International Operations

### Human Rights Proposals



**General Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals requesting a report on company or company supplier labor and/or human rights standards and policies unless such information is already publicly disclosed.

Vote case-by-case on proposals to implement company or company supplier labor and/or human rights standards and policies, considering:

- The degree to which existing relevant policies and practices are disclosed;
- Whether or not existing relevant policies are consistent with internationally recognized standards;
- Whether company facilities and those of its suppliers are monitored and how;
- Company participation in fair labor organizations or other internationally recognized human rights initiatives;
- Scope and nature of business conducted in markets known to have higher risk of workplace labor/human rights abuse;
- Recent, significant company controversies, fines, or litigation regarding human rights at the company or its suppliers;
- The scope of the request; and
- Deviation from industry sector peer company standards and practices.

Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting that a company conduct an assessment of the human rights risks in its operations or in its supply chain, or report on its human rights risk assessment process, considering:

- The degree to which existing relevant policies and practices are disclosed, including information on the implementation of these policies and any related oversight mechanisms;
- The company's industry and whether the company or its suppliers operate in countries or areas where there is a history of human rights concerns;
- Recent significant controversies, fines, or litigation regarding human rights involving the company or its suppliers, and whether the company has taken remedial steps; and
- Whether the proposal is unduly burdensome or overly prescriptive.

### Mandatory Arbitration



**General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on requests for a report on a company's use of mandatory arbitration on employment-related claims, taking into account:

- The company's current policies and practices related to the use of mandatory arbitration agreements on workplace claims;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent controversy, litigation, or regulatory actions related to the use of mandatory arbitration agreements on workplace claims; and
- The company's disclosure of its policies and practices related to the use of mandatory arbitration agreements compared to its peers.

**Operations in High Risk Markets**

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on requests for a report on a company's potential financial and reputational risks associated with operations in "high-risk" markets, such as a terrorism-sponsoring state or politically/socially unstable region, taking into account:

- The nature, purpose, and scope of the operations and business involved that could be affected by social or political disruption;
- Current disclosure of applicable risk assessment(s) and risk management procedures;
- Compliance with U.S. sanctions and laws;
- Consideration of other international policies, standards, and laws; and
- Whether the company has been recently involved in recent, significant controversies, fines, or litigation related to its operations in "high-risk" markets.

**Outsourcing/Offshoring**

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals calling for companies to report on the risks associated with outsourcing/plant closures, considering:

- Controversies surrounding operations in the relevant market(s);
- The value of the requested report to shareholders;
- The company's current level of disclosure of relevant information on outsourcing and plant closure procedures; and
- The company's existing human rights standards relative to industry peers.

**Sexual Harassment**

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on requests for a report on company actions taken to strengthen policies and oversight to prevent workplace sexual harassment, or a report on risks posed by a company's failure to prevent workplace sexual harassment, taking into account:

- The company's current policies, practices, oversight mechanisms related to preventing workplace sexual harassment;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent controversy, litigation, or regulatory actions related to workplace sexual harassment issues; and
- The company's disclosure regarding workplace sexual harassment policies or initiatives compared to its industry peers.

**Weapons and Military Sales**

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote against reports on foreign military sales or offsets. Such disclosures may involve sensitive and confidential information. Moreover, companies must comply with government controls and reporting on foreign military sales.

Generally vote against proposals asking a company to cease production or report on the risks associated with the use of depleted uranium munitions or nuclear weapons components and delivery systems, including disengaging from current and proposed contracts. Such contracts are monitored by government agencies, serve multiple military and non-military uses, and withdrawal from these contracts could have a negative impact on the company's business.

**Political Activities****Lobbying**

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting information on a company's lobbying

(including direct, indirect, and grassroots lobbying) activities, policies, or procedures, considering:



- The company's current disclosure of relevant lobbying policies, and management and board oversight;
- The company's disclosure regarding trade associations or other groups that it supports, or is a member of, that engage in lobbying activities; and
- Recent significant controversies, fines, or litigation regarding the company's lobbying-related activities.

### **Political Contributions**



**General Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals requesting greater disclosure of a company's political contributions and trade association spending policies and activities, considering:

- The company's policies, and management and board oversight related to its direct political contributions and payments to trade associations or other groups that may be used for political purposes;
- The company's disclosure regarding its support of, and participation in, trade associations or other groups that may make political contributions; and
- Recent significant controversies, fines, or litigation related to the company's political contributions or political activities.

Vote against proposals barring a company from making political contributions. Businesses are affected by legislation at the federal, state, and local level; barring political contributions can put the company at a competitive disadvantage.

Vote against proposals to publish in newspapers and other media a company's political contributions. Such publications could present significant cost to the company without providing commensurate value to shareholders.

### **Political Ties**



**General Recommendation:** Generally vote against proposals asking a company to affirm political nonpartisanship in the workplace, so long as:

- There are no recent, significant controversies, fines, or litigation regarding the company's political contributions or trade association spending; and
- The company has procedures in place to ensure that employee contributions to company-sponsored political action committees (PACs) are strictly voluntary and prohibit coercion.

Vote against proposals asking for a list of company executives, directors, consultants, legal counsels, lobbyists, or investment bankers that have prior government service and whether such service had a bearing on the business of the company. Such a list would be burdensome to prepare without providing any meaningful information to shareholders.

## 8. Mutual Fund Proxies

### Election of Directors

- **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on the election of directors and trustees, following the same guidelines for uncontested directors for public company shareholder meetings. However, mutual fund boards do not usually have compensation committees, so do not withhold for the lack of this committee.

### Closed End Funds- Unilateral Opt-In to Control Share Acquisition Statutes

- **General Recommendation:** For closed-end management investment companies (CEFs), vote against or withhold from nominating/governance committee members (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) at CEFs that have not provided a compelling rationale for opting-in to a Control Share Acquisition statute, nor submitted a by-law amendment to a shareholder vote.

### Converting Closed-end Fund to Open-end Fund

- **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on conversion proposals, considering the following factors:
- Past performance as a closed-end fund;
  - Market in which the fund invests;
  - Measures taken by the board to address the discount; and
  - Past shareholder activism, board activity, and votes on related proposals.

### Proxy Contests

- **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proxy contests, considering the following factors:
- Past performance relative to its peers;
  - Market in which the fund invests;
  - Measures taken by the board to address the issues;
  - Past shareholder activism, board activity, and votes on related proposals;
  - Strategy of the incumbents versus the dissidents;
  - Independence of directors;
  - Experience and skills of director candidates;
  - Governance profile of the company;
  - Evidence of management entrenchment.


### Investment Advisory Agreements

- **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on investment advisory agreements, considering the following factors:
- Proposed and current fee schedules;
  - Fund category/investment objective;
  - Performance benchmarks;
  - Share price performance as compared with peers;
  - Resulting fees relative to peers;
  - Assignments (where the advisor undergoes a change of control).

### Approving New Classes or Series of Shares

- **General Recommendation:** Vote for the establishment of new classes or series of shares.

### Preferred Stock Proposals

-  **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on the authorization for or increase in preferred shares, considering the following factors:

- Stated specific financing purpose;
- Possible dilution for common shares;
- Whether the shares can be used for antitakeover purposes.

### 1940 Act Policies

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on policies under the Investment Advisor Act of 1940, considering the following factors:

- Potential competitiveness;
- Regulatory developments;
- Current and potential returns; and
- Current and potential risk.

Generally vote for these amendments as long as the proposed changes do not fundamentally alter the investment focus of the fund and do comply with the current SEC interpretation.

### Changing a Fundamental Restriction to a Nonfundamental Restriction

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to change a fundamental restriction to a non-fundamental restriction, considering the following factors:

- The fund's target investments;
- The reasons given by the fund for the change; and
- The projected impact of the change on the portfolio.

### Change Fundamental Investment Objective to Nonfundamental

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote against proposals to change a fund's fundamental investment objective to non-fundamental.

### Name Change Proposals

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on name change proposals, considering the following factors:

- Political/economic changes in the target market;
- Consolidation in the target market; and
- Current asset composition.

### Change in Fund's Subclassification

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on changes in a fund's sub-classification, considering the following factors:

- Potential competitiveness;
- Current and potential returns;
- Risk of concentration;
- Consolidation in target industry.

### Business Development Companies—Authorization to Sell Shares of Common Stock at a Price below Net Asset Value

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote for proposals authorizing the board to issue shares below Net Asset Value (NAV) if:


- The proposal to allow share issuances below NAV has an expiration date no more than one year from the date

shareholders approve the underlying proposal, as required under the Investment Company Act of 1940;

- The sale is deemed to be in the best interests of shareholders by (1) a majority of the company's independent directors and (2) a majority of the company's directors who have no financial interest in the issuance; and


- The company has demonstrated responsible past use of share issuances by either:
- Outperforming peers in its 8-digit GICS group as measured by one- and three-year median TSRs; or
- Providing disclosure that its past share issuances were priced at levels that resulted in only small or moderate discounts to NAV and economic dilution to existing non-participating shareholders.

### Disposition of Assets/Termination/Liquidation

 **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to dispose of assets, to terminate or liquidate, considering the following factors:

- Strategies employed to salvage the company;
- The fund's past performance;
- The terms of the liquidation.

### Changes to the Charter Document


 **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on changes to the charter document, considering the following factors:

- The degree of change implied by the proposal;
- The efficiencies that could result;
- The state of incorporation;
- Regulatory standards and implications.

Vote against any of the following changes:


- Removal of shareholder approval requirement to reorganize or terminate the trust or any of its series;
- Removal of shareholder approval requirement for amendments to the new declaration of trust;
- Removal of shareholder approval requirement to amend the fund's management contract, allowing the contract to be modified by the investment manager and the trust management, as permitted by the 1940 Act;
- Allow the trustees to impose other fees in addition to sales charges on investment in a fund, such as deferred sales charges and redemption fees that may be imposed upon redemption of a fund's shares;
- Removal of shareholder approval requirement to engage in and terminate subadvisory arrangements;
- Removal of shareholder approval requirement to change the domicile of the fund.

### Changing the Domicile of a Fund


 **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on re-incorporations, considering the following factors:

- Regulations of both states;
- Required fundamental policies of both states;
- The increased flexibility available.

### Authorizing the Board to Hire and Terminate Subadvisers Without Shareholder Approval

 **General Recommendation:** Vote against proposals authorizing the board to hire or terminate subadvisers without shareholder approval if the investment adviser currently employs only one subadviser.

### Distribution Agreements

 **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on distribution agreement proposals, considering the following factors:

- Fees charged to comparably sized funds with similar objectives;
- The proposed distributor's reputation and past performance;

- The competitiveness of the fund in the industry;
- The terms of the agreement.

**Master-Feeder Structure**

▷ **General Recommendation:** Vote for the establishment of a master-feeder structure.

**Mergers**

▷ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on merger proposals, considering the following factors:

- Resulting fee structure;
- Performance of both funds;
- Continuity of management personnel;
- Changes in corporate governance and their impact on shareholder rights.

## Shareholder Proposals for Mutual Funds

**Establish Director Ownership Requirement**

▷ **General Recommendation:** Generally vote against shareholder proposals that mandate a specific minimum amount of stock that directors must own in order to qualify as a director or to remain on the board.

**Reimburse Shareholder for Expenses Incurred**

▷ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals to reimburse proxy solicitation expenses. When supporting the dissidents, vote for the reimbursement of the proxy solicitation expenses.

**Terminate the Investment Advisor**

▷ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to terminate the investment advisor, considering the following factors:

- Performance of the fund's Net Asset Value (NAV);
- The fund's history of shareholder relations;
- The performance of other funds under the advisor's management.



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