

VALKYRIE ETF TRUST II
(the “*Trust*”)

COINSHARES VALKYRIE BITCOIN MINERS ETF
(the “*FUND*”)
JULY 14, 2025

SUPPLEMENT TO THE FUND’S SUMMARY PROSPECTUS, PROSPECTUS AND STATEMENT OF ADDITIONAL
INFORMATION
DATED JANUARY 31, 2025

IMPORTANT NOTICE REGARDING CHANGES IN THE FUND’S NAME

CoinShares Valkyrie Bitcoin Miners ETF. The Board of Trustees of the Trust considered and approved a change to the name of the Fund. Effective on or about July 15, 2025 (the “*Effective Date*”), the Fund’s name will change to the “CoinShares Bitcoin Mining ETF.”

The change will not affect the Fund’s investment objective, principal investment strategy or portfolio holdings and the Fund’s shares will continue to trade on Nasdaq Stock Market LLC under the ticker symbol “WGMI.”

PLEASE RETAIN THIS SUPPLEMENT FOR FUTURE REFERENCE.

STATEMENT OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

VALKYRIE ETF TRUST II
INVESTMENT COMPANY ACT FILE NO. 811-23725

CoinShares

COINSHARES VALKYRIE BITCOIN MINERS ETF

TICKER SYMBOL
WGMI

EXCHANGE
Nasdaq

DATED JANUARY 31, 2025

This Statement of Additional Information (“SAI”) is not a prospectus. It should be read in conjunction with the prospectus dated January 31, 2025, as it may be revised from time to time (the “Prospectus”), for the CoinShares Valkyrie Bitcoin Miners ETF (the “Fund”), a series of the Valkyrie ETF Trust II (the “Trust”). Capitalized terms used herein that are not defined have the same meanings as in the Prospectus, unless otherwise noted. A copy of the Prospectus may be obtained without charge by writing to the Trust’s distributor, ALPS Distributors, Inc., at 1290 Broadway, Suite 1000, Denver, Colorado 80203, or by calling toll free at (303)-623-2577.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

General Description of the Trust and the Fund	A-1
Exchange Listing and Trading	A-1
Investment Objective and Policies	A-2
Investment Strategies	A-3
Investment Risks	A-5
Management of the Fund	A-8
Control Persons and Principal Holders of Securities	A-14
Investment Adviser and Other Service Providers	A-14
Brokerage Allocations	A-18
Additional Information	A-19
Proxy Voting Policies and Procedures	A-20
Creation and Redemption of Creation Units	A-20
Federal Tax Matters	A-23
Determination of Net Asset Value	A-27
Dividends and Distributions	A-28
Miscellaneous Information	A-28
Performance Information	A-28
Financial Statements	A-28

The audited financial statements for the Fund's most recent fiscal year appear in the Funds' Annual Report to Shareholders dated September 30, 2024, which was filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (the "SEC") on December 6, 2024. The financial statements from the Annual Report are incorporated herein by reference. The Annual Report is available without charge by calling (855) 267-3837 or by visiting the SEC's website at www.sec.gov.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE TRUST AND THE FUND

The Trust is a Delaware statutory trust organized on December 11, 2020. The Trust is an open-end management investment company, registered under the Investment Company Act of 1940, as amended (the “1940 Act”). The Trust currently offers shares of 3 separate series, representing separate portfolios of investments. This SAI relates solely to the Fund, which is non-diversified.

The Fund is advised by Valkyrie Funds LLC (the “Adviser or “Valkyrie”). Vident Advisory, LLC (d/b/a Vident Asset Management) (“Vident” or the “Sub-Adviser”) serves as investment sub-adviser to the Fund.

The shares of the Fund (“Shares”) list and principally trade on the Nasdaq Stock Market LLC (“Nasdaq” or the “Exchange”). The Shares will trade on the Exchange at market prices that may be below, at or above net asset value (“NAV”). ETFs, such as the Fund, do not sell or redeem individual shares of the Fund. Instead, The Fund offers, issues and redeems Shares at NAV only in aggregations of a specified number of Shares (each a “Creation Unit”). Financial entities known as “authorized participants” or “APs” (which are discussed in greater detail below) have contractual arrangements with the Fund or the Distributor to purchase and redeem Fund Shares directly with the Fund in Creation Units in exchange for the securities comprising the Fund and/or cash, or some combination thereof. An authorized participant that purchases a Creation Unit of Fund Shares deposits with the Fund a “basket” of securities and other assets identified by the Fund that day, and then receives the Creation Unit of Fund Shares in return for those assets. The redemption process is the reverse of the purchase process: the authorized participant redeems a Creation Unit of Fund Shares for a basket of securities and/or other assets. The basket is generally representative of the Fund’s portfolio, and together with a cash balancing amount, it is equal to the NAV of the Fund Shares comprising the Creation Unit. Pursuant to Rule 6c-11 of the 1940 Act, the Fund may utilize baskets that are not representative of the Fund’s portfolio. Such “custom baskets” are discussed in the section entitled “Creations and Redemptions of Creation Units.” Transaction fees and other costs associated with creations or redemptions that include cash may be higher than the transaction fees and other costs associated with in-kind creations or redemptions. In all cases, conditions with respect to creations and redemptions of shares and fees will be limited in accordance with the requirements of SEC rules and regulations applicable to management investment companies offering redeemable securities.

The Fund is a separate series of the Trust, and each Share represents an equal proportionate interest in the Fund. All consideration received by the Trust for Shares and all assets of the Fund belong solely to the Fund and would be subject to liabilities related thereto. The Board of Trustees of the Trust (the “Board of Trustees” or the “Trustees”) has the right to establish additional series in the future, to determine the preferences, voting powers, rights and privileges thereof and to modify such preferences, voting powers, rights and privileges without shareholder approval. Shares of any series may also be divided into one or more classes at the discretion of the Trustees. The Trust or any series or class thereof may be terminated at any time by the Board of Trustees upon written notice to the shareholders.

EXCHANGE LISTING AND TRADING

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 Fund, there are fewer than 50 beneficial holders of the Shares; (2) the Exchange becomes aware that the Fund is no longer eligible to operate in reliance on Rule 6c-11 under the 1940 Act; (3) the Fund no longer complies with certain listing exchange rules; 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 of the Fund from listing and trading upon termination of the Trust or the Fund.

As in the case of other stocks traded on the Exchange, brokers’ commissions on transactions will be based on negotiated commission rates at customary levels.

The Fund reserves the right to adjust the price levels of Shares in the future to help 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.

The Fund is required by the Exchange to comply with certain listing standards (which includes certain investment parameters) in order to maintain its listing on the Exchange. Compliance with these listing standards may compel the Fund to sell securities at an inopportune time or for a price other than the security’s then-current market value. The sale of securities in such circumstances could limit the Fund’s profit or require the Fund to incur a loss, and as a result, the Fund’s performance could be impacted.

INVESTMENT OBJECTIVE AND POLICIES

The Prospectus describes the investment objective and certain policies of the Fund. The following supplements the information contained in the Prospectus concerning the investment objective and policies of the Fund.

The Fund is subject to the following fundamental policies, which may not be changed without approval of the holders of a majority of the outstanding voting securities (as such term is defined in the 1940 Act) of the Fund:

- (1) The Fund may not issue senior securities, except as permitted under the 1940 Act.
- (2) The Fund may not borrow money, except as permitted under the 1940 Act.
- (3) The Fund will not underwrite the securities of other issuers except to the extent the Fund may be considered an underwriter under the 1933 Act in connection with the purchase and sale of portfolio securities.
- (4) The Fund will not purchase or sell real estate or interests therein, unless acquired as a result of ownership of securities or other instruments (but this shall not prohibit the Fund from purchasing or selling securities or other instruments backed by real estate or of issuers engaged in real estate activities).
- (5) The Fund may not make loans, except as permitted under the 1940 Act and exemptive orders granted thereunder.
- (6) The Fund may not purchase or sell physical commodities unless acquired as a result of ownership of securities or other instruments (but this shall not prevent the Fund from purchasing or selling options, futures contracts, forward contracts or other derivative instruments, or from investing in securities or other instruments backed by physical commodities).
- (7) The Fund will concentrate its investments in securities of issuers in the industry or group of industries comprising the information technology sector. This restriction does not apply to obligations issued or guaranteed by the U.S. government, its agencies or instrumentalities, or securities of other investment companies.

For purposes of applying restriction (1) above, under the 1940 Act as currently in effect, the Fund is not permitted to issue senior securities, except that the Fund may borrow from any bank if immediately after such borrowing the value of the Fund's total assets is at least 300% of the principal amount of all of the Fund's borrowings (*i.e.*, the principal amount of the borrowings may not exceed 33 1/3% of the Fund's total assets). In the event that such asset coverage shall at any time fall below 300% the Fund shall, within three days thereafter (not including Sundays and holidays), reduce the amount of its borrowings to an extent that the asset coverage of such borrowings shall be at least 300%. The fundamental investment limitations set forth above limit the Fund's ability to engage in certain investment practices and purchase securities or other instruments to the extent permitted by, or consistent with, applicable law. As such, these limitations will change as the statute, rules, regulations or orders (or, if applicable, interpretations) change, and no shareholder vote will be required or sought.

Except for restriction (2), if a percentage restriction is adhered to at the time of investment, a later increase in percentage resulting from a change in market value of the investment or the total assets will not constitute a violation of that restriction. With respect to restriction (2), if the limitations are exceeded as a result of a change in market value then the Fund will reduce the amount of borrowings within three days thereafter to the extent necessary to comply with the limitations (not including Sundays and holidays).

For purposes of applying restriction (5) above, the Fund may not make loans to other persons, except through (i) the purchase of debt securities permissible under the Fund's investment policies, (ii) repurchase agreements, or (iii) the lending of portfolio securities, provided that no such loan of portfolio securities may be made by the Fund if, as a result, the aggregate of such loans would exceed 33-1/3% of the value of the Fund's total assets.

The foregoing fundamental policies of the Fund may not be changed without the affirmative vote of the majority of the outstanding voting securities of the Fund. The 1940 Act defines a majority vote as the vote of the lesser of (i) 67% or more of the voting securities represented at a meeting at which more than 50% of the outstanding securities are represented; or (ii) more than 50% of the outstanding voting securities. With respect to the submission of a change in an investment policy to the holders of outstanding voting securities of the Fund, such matter shall be deemed to have been effectively acted upon with respect to the Fund if a majority of the outstanding voting securities of the Fund vote for the approval of such matter, notwithstanding that such matter has not been approved by the holders of a majority of the outstanding voting securities of any other series of the Trust affected by such matter.

In addition to the foregoing fundamental policies, the Fund is also subject to strategies and policies discussed herein which, unless otherwise noted, are non-fundamental policies and may be changed by the Board of Trustees.

INVESTMENT STRATEGIES

Under normal circumstances, the Fund will invest principally in the securities of companies engaged in bitcoin mining operations or those companies providing specialized chips, hardware and software or other services to companies engaged in bitcoin mining. The Fund may invest in companies of any market capitalization, as well as in non-U.S. securities (including securities issued by companies operating in emerging market countries) either directly or through the use of American depositary receipts.

Types of Investments

Common Stocks. Common stock represents an ownership position in a company. Common stock may or may not pay dividends and may or may not carry voting rights. Common stock occupies the most junior position in a company's capital structure. Holders of common stocks incur more risk than holders of preferred stocks and debt obligations because common stockholders, as owners of the issuer, generally have inferior rights to receive payments from the issuer in comparison with the rights of creditors, or holders of debt obligations or preferred stocks. Unlike debt securities, which typically have a stated principal amount payable at maturity (whose value, however, is subject to market fluctuations prior thereto), or preferred stocks, which typically have a liquidation preference and which may have stated optional or mandatory redemption provisions, common stocks have neither a fixed principal amount nor a maturity.

Depository Receipts. The Fund may invest in securities of non-U.S. issuers in the form of sponsored or unsponsored American Depositary Receipts ("ADRs"), Global Depositary Receipts ("GDRs") and European Depositary Receipts ("EDRs") (collectively "*Depository Receipts*"). ADRs are Depositary Receipts normally issued by a U.S. bank or trust company that evidence ownership of underlying securities issued by a non-U.S. corporation. EDRs and GDRs are typically issued by non-U.S. banks or trust companies, although they also may be issued by U.S. banks or trust companies, and evidence ownership of underlying securities issued by either a non-U.S. or a U.S. corporation. Generally, Depositary Receipts in registered form are designed for use in the U.S. securities market. Depositary Receipts in bearer form are designed for use in securities markets outside the United States. Depositary Receipts may not necessarily be denominated in the same currency as the underlying securities into which they may be converted. Ownership of unsponsored Depositary Receipts may not entitle the Fund to financial or other reports from the issuer of the underlying security, to which it would be entitled as the owner of sponsored Depositary Receipts. The issuers of unsponsored Depositary Receipts are not obligated to disclose material information in the United States; therefore, there may be less information available regarding such issuers and there may not be a correlation between such information and the market value of the Depositary Receipts.

Illiquid Investments. Pursuant to Rule 22e-4 under the 1940 Act, the Fund may not acquire any "illiquid investment" if, immediately after the acquisition, the Fund would have invested more than 15% of its net assets in illiquid investments that are assets. An "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 include repurchase agreements with a notice or demand period of more than seven days, certain stripped mortgage-backed securities, certain municipal leases, certain over-the-counter derivative instruments, securities and other financial instruments that are not readily marketable, and restricted securities unless, based upon a review of the relevant market, trading and investment-specific considerations, those investments are determined not to be illiquid. The Trust has implemented a liquidity risk management program and related procedures to identify illiquid investments pursuant to Rule 22e-4, and the Board of Trustees has approved the designation of the certain officers of the Trust to administer the Trust's liquidity risk management program and related procedures. In determining whether an investment is an illiquid investment, the designated officers of the Trust will take into account actual or estimated daily transaction volume of an investment, group of related investments or asset class and other relevant market, trading, and investment-specific considerations. In addition, in determining the liquidity of an investment, the designated officers of the Trust must determine whether trading varying portions of a position in a particular portfolio investment or asset class, in sizes that the Fund would reasonably anticipate trading, is reasonably expected to significantly affect its liquidity, and if so, the Fund must take this determination into account when classifying the liquidity of that investment or asset class.

In addition to actual or estimated daily transaction volume of an investment, group of related investments or asset class and other relevant market, trading, and investment-specific considerations, the following factors, among others, will generally impact the classification of an investment as an "illiquid investment": (i) any investment that is placed on the Adviser's restricted trading list; and (ii) any investment that is delisted or for which there is a trading halt at the close of the trading day on the primary listing exchange at the time of classification (and in respect of which no active secondary market exists). Investments purchased by the Fund that are liquid at the time of purchase may subsequently become illiquid due to these and other events and circumstances. If one or more investments in the Fund's portfolio become illiquid, the Fund may exceed the 15% limitation in illiquid investments. In the event that changes in the portfolio or other external events cause the Fund to exceed this limit, the Fund must take steps to bring its illiquid investments that are assets to or below 15% of its net assets within a reasonable period of time. This requirement would not force the Fund to liquidate any portfolio instrument where the Fund would suffer a loss on the sale of that instrument.

Non-U.S. Securities. The Fund may have exposure to non-U.S. securities. Non-U.S. securities include securities issued or guaranteed by companies organized under the laws of countries other than the United States (including emerging markets), securities issued or guaranteed by foreign, national, provincial, state, municipal or other governments with taxing authority or by their agencies or instrumentalities and debt obligations of supranational governmental entities such as the World Bank or European Union. Foreign securities may also include U.S. dollar-denominated debt obligations, such as “Yankee Dollar” obligations, of non-U.S. issuers and of supra-national government entities. Yankee Dollar obligations are U.S. dollar-denominated obligations issued in the U.S. capital markets by foreign corporations, banks and governments. Foreign securities also may be traded on foreign securities exchanges or in over-the-counter (“OTC”) capital markets.

Certain of the Fund’s investment in foreign securities may be denominated in currencies other than the U.S. dollar. To the extent the Fund invests in such instruments, the value of the assets of the Fund as measured in U.S. dollars will be affected by changes in exchange rates. Generally, the Fund’s currency exchange transactions will be conducted on a spot (*i.e.*, cash) basis at the spot rate prevailing in the currency exchange market. The cost of the Fund’s currency exchange transactions will generally be the difference between the bid and offer spot rate of the currency being purchased or sold. In order to protect against uncertainty in the level of future currency exchange rates, the Fund is authorized to enter into various currency exchange transactions.

Securities Lending. The Fund may lend portfolio securities in an amount up to one-third of its total assets to brokers, dealers and other financial institutions. In a portfolio securities lending transaction, the Fund receives from the borrower an amount equal to the interest paid or the dividends declared on the loaned securities during the term of the loan as well as the interest on the collateral securities, less any fees (such as finders or administrative fees) the Fund pays in arranging the loan. The Fund may share the interest it receives on the collateral securities with the borrower. The terms of the Fund’s loans permit the Fund to reacquire loaned securities on five business days’ notice or in time to vote on any important matter. Loans are subject to termination at the option of the Fund or borrower at any time, and the borrowed securities must be returned when the loan is terminated. The Fund may pay fees to arrange for securities loans.

The SEC currently requires that the following conditions must be met whenever the Fund’s portfolio securities are loaned: (1) the Fund must receive at least 100% cash collateral from the borrower; (2) the borrower must increase such collateral whenever the market value of the securities rises above the level of such collateral; (3) the Fund must be able to terminate the loan at any time; (4) the Fund must receive reasonable interest on the loan, as well as any dividends, interest or other distributions on the loaned securities, and any increase in market value; (5) the Fund may pay only reasonable custodian fees approved by the Board in connection with the loan; (6) while voting rights on the loaned securities may pass to the borrower, the Board must terminate the loan and regain the right to vote the securities if a material event adversely affecting the investment occurs, and (7) the Fund may not loan its portfolio securities so that the value of the loaned securities is more than one-third of its total asset value, including collateral received from such loans. These conditions may be subject to future modification. Such loans will be terminable at any time upon specified notice. The Fund might experience the risk of loss if the institution with which it has engaged in a portfolio loan transaction breaches its agreement with the Fund. In addition, the Fund will not enter into any portfolio security lending arrangement having a duration of longer than one year. The principal risk of portfolio lending is potential default or insolvency of the borrower. In either of these cases, the Fund could experience delays in recovering securities or collateral or could lose all or part of the value of the loaned securities. As part of participating in a lending program, the Fund may be required to invest in collateralized debt or other securities that bear the risk of loss of principal. In addition, all investments made with the collateral received are subject to the risks associated with such investments. If such investments lose value, the Fund will have to cover the loss when repaying the collateral.

Any loans of portfolio securities are fully collateralized based on values that are marked-to-market daily. Any securities that the Fund may receive as collateral will not become part of the Fund’s investment portfolio at the time of the loan and, in the event of a default by the borrower, the Fund will, if permitted by law, dispose of such collateral except for such part thereof that is a security in which the Fund is permitted to invest. During the time securities are on loan, the borrower will pay the Fund any accrued income on those securities, and the Fund may invest the cash collateral and earn income or receive an agreed-upon fee from a borrower that has delivered cash-equivalent collateral.

Short-Term Instruments and Temporary Investments. The Fund may invest in short-term instruments, including money market instruments, on an ongoing basis to provide liquidity, in connection with collateral received by the Fund in its securities lending activities, or for other reasons. Money market instruments are generally short-term investments that may include, but are not limited to: (i) shares of money market funds; (ii) obligations issued or guaranteed by the U.S. government, its agencies or instrumentalities (including government-sponsored enterprises); (iii) negotiable certificates of deposit, bankers’ acceptances, fixed-time deposits and

other obligations of U.S. and non-U.S. banks (including non-U.S. branches) and similar institutions; (iv) commercial paper rated, at the date of purchase, “Prime-1” by Moody’s® Investors Service, Inc., “F-1” by Fitch Ratings, Inc., or “A-1” by Standard & Poor’s® Financial Services LLC, a subsidiary of S&P Global, Inc., or if unrated, of comparable quality as determined by the Adviser and/or Sub-Adviser; (v) non-convertible corporate debt securities (e.g., bonds and debentures) with remaining maturities at the date of purchase of not more than 397 days and that satisfy the rating requirements set forth in Rule 2a-7 under the 1940 Act; (vi) repurchase agreements; and (vii) short-term U.S. dollar denominated obligations of non-U.S. banks (including U.S. branches) that, in the opinion of the Adviser and/or Sub-Adviser, are of comparable quality to obligations of U.S. banks that may be purchased by the Fund. Any of these instruments may be purchased on a current or forward-settled basis. Time deposits are non-negotiable deposits maintained in banking institutions for specified periods of time at stated interest rates. Bankers’ acceptances are time drafts drawn on commercial banks by borrowers, usually in connection with international transactions.

Portfolio Turnover

The Fund buys and sells portfolio securities in the normal course of its investment activities. The proportion of the Fund’s investment portfolio that is bought and sold during a year is known as the Fund’s portfolio turnover rate. A turnover rate of 100% would occur, for example, if the Fund bought and sold securities valued at 100% of its net assets within one year. A high portfolio turnover rate could result in the payment by the Fund of increased brokerage costs, expenses and taxes. Significant variations in portfolio turnover from year-to-year are generally the result of fluctuations in the size of a Fund or changes to a Fund’s portfolio holdings. During the fiscal year ended September 30, 2023, the Fund’s portfolio turnover rate was 74% of the average value of its portfolio. During the fiscal year ended September 30, 2024, the Fund’s portfolio turnover rate was 45% of the average value of its portfolio.

INVESTMENT RISKS

Overview

An investment in the Fund should be made with an understanding of the risks that an investment in the Fund shares entails, including the risk that the financial condition of the issuers of the equity securities or the general condition of the securities market may worsen and the value of the securities and therefore the value of the Fund may decline. The Fund may not be an appropriate investment for those who are unable or unwilling to assume the risks involved generally with such an investment. The past market and earnings performance of any of the securities included in the Fund is not predictive of their future performance.

Borrowing and Leverage Risk

When the Fund borrows money, it must pay interest and other fees, which will reduce the Fund’s returns if such costs exceed the returns on the portfolio securities purchased or retained with such borrowings. Any such borrowings are intended to be temporary. However, under certain market conditions, including periods of low demand or decreased liquidity, such borrowings might be outstanding for longer periods of time. As prescribed by the 1940 Act, the Fund will be required to maintain specified asset coverage of at least 300% with respect to any bank borrowing immediately following such borrowing. The Fund may be required to dispose of assets on unfavorable terms if market fluctuations or other factors reduce the Fund’s asset coverage to less than the prescribed amount.

Common Stocks Risk

Common stocks are especially susceptible to general market movements and to volatile increases and decreases of value as market confidence in and perceptions of the issuers change. These perceptions are based on unpredictable factors including expectations regarding government, economic, monetary and fiscal policies, inflation and interest rates, economic expansion or contraction, and global or regional political, economic or banking crises. Neither the Adviser nor Sub-Adviser can predict the direction or scope of any of these factors. Shareholders of common stocks have rights to receive payments from the issuers of those common stocks that are generally subordinate to those of creditors of, or holders of debt obligations or preferred stocks of, such issuers.

Shareholders of common stocks of the type held by the Fund have a right to receive dividends only when and if, and in the amounts, declared by the issuer’s board of directors and have a right to participate in amounts available for distribution by the issuer only after all other claims on the issuer have been paid. Common stocks do not represent an obligation of the issuer and, therefore, do not offer any assurance of income or provide the same degree of protection of capital as do debt securities. The issuance of additional debt securities or preferred stock will create prior claims for payment of principal, interest and dividends which could adversely affect the ability and inclination of the issuer to declare or pay dividends on its common stock or the rights of holders of common stock with

respect to assets of the issuer upon liquidation or bankruptcy. The value of common stocks is subject to market fluctuations for as long as the common stocks remain outstanding, and thus the value of the equity securities in the Fund will fluctuate over the life of the Fund and may be more or less than the price at which they were purchased by the Fund. The equity securities held in the Fund may appreciate or depreciate in value (or pay dividends) depending on the full range of economic and market influences affecting these securities, including the impact of the Fund's purchase and sale of the equity securities and other factors.

Holders of common stocks incur more risk than holders of preferred stocks and debt obligations because common stockholders, as owners of the entity, have generally inferior rights to receive payments from the issuer in comparison with the rights of creditors of, or holders of debt obligations or preferred stocks issued by, the issuer. Cumulative preferred stock dividends must be paid before common stock dividends and any cumulative preferred stock dividend omitted is added to future dividends payable to the holders of cumulative preferred stock. Preferred stockholders are also generally entitled to rights on liquidation, which are senior to those of common stockholders.

Cyber Security Risk

As the use of Internet technology has become more prevalent in the course of business, The Fund have become more susceptible to potential operational risks through breaches in cyber security. A breach in cyber security refers to both intentional and unintentional events that may cause the Fund to lose proprietary information, suffer data corruption or lose operational capacity. Such events could cause the Fund to incur regulatory penalties, reputational damage, additional compliance costs associated with corrective measures and/or financial loss. Cyber security breaches may involve unauthorized access to the Fund's digital information systems through "hacking" or malicious software coding, but may also result from outside attacks such as denial-of-service attacks through efforts to make network services unavailable to intended users. In addition, cyber security breaches of the Fund's third party service providers, such as its administrator, transfer agent, custodian, or sub-adviser, as applicable, or issuers in which the Fund invests, can also subject the Fund to many of the same risks associated with direct cyber security breaches. The Fund has established risk management systems designed to reduce the risks associated with cyber security. However, there is no guarantee that such efforts will succeed, especially because the Fund does not directly control the cyber security systems of issuers or third party service providers.

Depository Receipts Risk

Investing in Depository Receipts involves the same risks as direct investments in non-U.S. securities. In addition, the underlying issuers of certain Depository Receipts are under no obligation to distribute shareholder communications or pass through any voting rights with respect to the deposited securities to the holders of such receipts. The Fund may therefore receive less timely information or have less control than if it invested directly in the non-U.S. issuer.

Failure to Qualify as a Regulated Investment Company Risk

If, in any year, the Fund fails to qualify as a regulated investment company under the applicable tax laws, the Fund would be taxed as an ordinary corporation. In such circumstances, the Fund could be required to recognize unrealized gains, pay substantial taxes and interest and make substantial distributions before requalifying as a regulated investment company that is accorded special tax treatment. If the Fund fails to qualify as a regulated investment company, distributions to the Fund's shareholders generally would be eligible for the dividends received deduction in the case of corporate shareholders.

Legal and Litigation Risk

In certain frontier and emerging markets, fraud and corruption may be more prevalent than in developed market countries. Securities and issuers that the Fund may invest in are exposed to these risks, which could have a negative impact on a security's value. It may be difficult for the Fund to obtain or enforce judgments against parties located outside of the U.S. It may be difficult or impossible to obtain or enforce remedies against non-U.S. governments, their agencies, quasi-sovereign entities, other non-U.S. issuers or counterparties.

Listing Standards Risk

The Fund is required by the Exchange to comply with certain listing standards (which includes certain investment parameters) in order to maintain its listing on the Exchange. Compliance with these listing standards may compel the Fund to sell securities at an inopportune time or for a price other than the security's then-current market value. The sale of securities in such circumstances could limit the Fund's profit or require the Fund to incur a loss, and as a result, the Fund's performance could be impacted.

Market Events Risk

Turbulence in the economic, political and financial system has historically resulted, and may continue to result, in an unusually high degree of volatility in the capital markets. Both domestic and non-U.S. capital markets have been experiencing increased volatility and turmoil, with issuers that have exposure to the real estate, mortgage and credit markets particularly affected, and it is uncertain whether or for how long these conditions could continue. Reduced liquidity in equity, credit and fixed-income markets may adversely affect many issuers worldwide. This 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 small or emerging market issuers having more difficulty obtaining financing, which may, in turn, cause a decline in their security prices. These events and possible continued market turbulence may have an adverse effect on the Fund.

In addition, local, regional or global events such as war, acts of terrorism, spread of infectious diseases or other public health issues, recessions, or other events could have a significant negative impact on the Fund and its investments. Such events may affect certain geographic regions, countries, sectors and industries more significantly than others. Such events could adversely affect the prices and liquidity of the Fund's portfolio securities or other instruments and could result in disruptions in the trading markets. Any of such circumstances could have a materially negative impact on the value of the Fund's Shares and result in increased market volatility. During any such events, the Fund's Shares may trade at increased premiums or discounts to their NAV.

Health crises caused by the outbreak of infectious diseases or other public health issues, may exacerbate other pre-existing political, social, economic, market and financial risks. The impact of any such events, could negatively affect the global economy, as well as the economies of individual countries or regions, the financial performance of individual companies, sectors and industries, and the markets in general in significant and unforeseen ways. Any such impact could adversely affect the prices and liquidity of the securities and other instruments in which the Fund invests and negatively impact the Fund's investment return.

For example, an outbreak of a respiratory disease designated as COVID-19 was first detected in China in December 2019 and subsequently spread internationally. The transmission of COVID-19 and efforts to contain its spread have resulted in international, national and local border closings and other significant travel restrictions and disruptions, significant disruptions to business operations, supply chains and customer activity, event cancellations and restrictions, service cancellations, reductions and other changes, significant challenges in healthcare service preparation and delivery, and quarantines, as well as general concern and uncertainty that has negatively affected the economic environment. These impacts also have caused significant volatility and declines in global financial markets, which have caused losses for investors. The impact of this COVID-19 pandemic may be short term or may last for an extended period of time, and in either case could result in a substantial economic downturn or recession.

In addition, the operations of the Fund, the Adviser, Sub-Adviser and the Fund's other service providers may be significantly impacted, or even temporarily or permanently halted, as a result of government quarantine measures, voluntary and precautionary restrictions on travel or meetings and other factors related to a public health emergency, including its potential adverse impact on the health of any such entity's personnel.

Additional Market Disruption Risk.

In late February 2022, Russia launched a large scale military attack on Ukraine. The invasion significantly amplified already existing geopolitical tensions among Russia, Ukraine, Europe, NATO and the West, including the U.S. In response to the military action by Russia, various countries, including the U.S., the United Kingdom, and European Union issued broad-ranging economic sanctions against Russia. Such sanctions included, among other things, a prohibition on doing business with certain Russian companies, large financial institutions, officials and oligarchs; a commitment by certain countries and the European Union to remove selected Russian banks from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications ("SWIFT"), the electronic banking network that connects banks globally; and restrictive measures to prevent the Russian Central Bank from undermining the impact of the sanctions. Additional sanctions may be imposed in the future. Such sanctions (and any future sanctions) and other actions against Russia may adversely impact, among other things, the Russian economy and various sectors of the economy, including but not limited to, financials, energy, metals and mining, engineering and defense and defense-related materials sectors; result in a decline in the value and liquidity of Russian securities; result in boycotts, tariffs, and purchasing and financing restrictions on Russia's government, companies and certain individuals; weaken the value of the ruble; downgrade the country's credit rating; freeze Russian securities and/or funds invested in prohibited assets and impair the ability to trade in Russian securities and/or other assets; and have other adverse consequences on the Russian government, economy, companies and region. Further, several large corporations and U.S. states have announced plans to divest interests or otherwise curtail business dealings with certain Russian businesses.

The ramifications of the hostilities and sanctions, however, may not be limited to Russia and Russian companies but may spill over to and negatively impact other regional and global economic markets of the world (including Europe and the United States), companies in other countries (particularly those that have done business with Russia) and on various sectors, industries and markets for securities and commodities globally, such as oil and natural gas. Accordingly, the actions discussed above and the potential for a wider conflict could increase financial market volatility, cause severe negative effects on regional and global economic markets, industries, and companies and have a negative effect on a Fund's investments and performance beyond any direct exposure to Russian issuers or those of adjoining geographic regions. In addition, Russia may take retaliatory actions and other countermeasures, including cyberattacks and espionage against other countries and companies in the world, which may negatively impact such countries and the securities in which the Fund invests. Accordingly, there may be heightened risk of cyberattacks which may result in, among other things, disruptions in the functioning and operations of industries or companies around the world, including in the United States and Europe.

Further, ongoing armed conflicts between Russia and Ukraine in Europe and among Israel, Hamas and other militant groups in the Middle East, have caused and could continue to cause significant market disruptions and volatility within the markets in Russia, Europe, the Middle East and the United States. The hostilities and sanctions resulting from those hostilities have and could continue to have a significant impact on certain Fund investments as well as Fund performance and liquidity.

The extent and duration of the military action or future escalation of such hostilities, the extent and impact of existing and future sanctions, market disruptions and volatility, and the result of any diplomatic negotiations cannot be predicted. These and any related events could have a significant impact on Fund performance and the value of an investment in the Fund.

Non-U.S. Securities Risk

The Fund's non-U.S. investments may be adversely affected by political and social instability, changes in economic or taxation policies, difficulty in enforcing obligations, decreased liquidity or increased volatility. Non-U.S. investments also involve the risk of the possible seizure, nationalization or expropriation of the issuer or non-U.S. deposits (in which an underlying fund could lose its entire investments in a certain market) and the possible adoption of non-U.S. governmental restrictions such as exchange controls. Unless the Fund has hedged its non-U.S. securities risk, non-U.S. securities risk also involves the risk of negative non-U.S. currency rate fluctuations, which may cause the value of securities denominated in such non-U.S. currency (or other instruments through which an underlying fund has exposure to non-U.S. currencies) to decline in value. Currency exchange rates may fluctuate significantly over short periods of time. Currency hedging strategies, if used, are not always successful.

MANAGEMENT OF THE FUND

Trustees and Officers

The general supervision of the duties performed for the Fund under the Investment Management Agreement (as defined below) is the responsibility of the Board of Trustees. There are four Trustees of the Trust, two of whom are "interested persons" (as the term is defined in the 1940 Act) ("*Interested Trustees*") and three of whom are Trustees who are not officers or employees of Valkyrie or any of its affiliates (each an "*Independent Trustee*" and collectively the "*Independent Trustees*"). The Trustees serve for indefinite terms until their resignation, death or removal. The Trust has not established a lead Independent Trustee position. The Trustees set broad policies for the Fund, choose the Trust's officers and hired the Fund's investment adviser. Nick Bonos is deemed an Interested Trustee of the Trust due to his positions as Chief Executive Officer and President of the Trust. The officers of the Trust manage its day-to-day operations, are responsible to the Board of Trustees and serve indefinite terms. The following is a list of the Trustees and executive officers of the Trust and a statement of their present positions and principal occupations during the past five years, the number of portfolios each Trustee oversees and the other directorships they have held during the past five years, if applicable.

Name, Address and Year of Birth	Position and Offices with Trust	Term of Office and Year First Elected or Appointed	Principal Occupations During Past 5 Years	Number of Portfolios in the Valkyrie Fund Complex Overseen by Trustee	Other Trusteeships or Directorships Held by Trustee During the Past 5 Years
Interested Trustee					
Nick Bonos c/o Valkyrie Funds LLC 320 Seven Springs Way, Suite 250, Nashville, Tennessee 37027 YOB: 1963	President and Chief Executive Officer	Indefinite term Since inception	Head of Fund Operations – US, CoinShares Co. (2024-present); Head of Fund Operations, Valkyrie Investments (2021-2024); Independent Consultant (2020-2021); President, Rydex Fund Services LLC (2016-2021); Chief Financial Officer, certain Guggenheim Mutual Funds and ETFs (2016-2019)	3	None
Independent Trustees					
Keith Fletcher c/o Valkyrie Funds LLC 320 Seven Springs Way, Suite 250, Nashville, Tennessee 37027 YOB: 1958	Trustee	Indefinite term Since inception	Principal and Chief Executive Officer, JAHFT Solutions LLC (2017-Present); Partner, Neos Investments (2023-Present)	3	Tortoise Capital Series Trust (2024-Present); Uncommon Portfolio Design Core Equity ETF (2020-2022)
Steve Lehman c/o Valkyrie Funds LLC 320 Seven Springs Way, Suite 250, Nashville, Tennessee 37027 YOB: 1952	Trustee	Indefinite term Since inception	Executive Board Member, CoFoundersLab (2018-Present) & ZeeWork (2024-Present); Executive Chairman, Vymedic Biotech (2019-Present)	3	None
Mark Osterheld c/o Valkyrie Funds LLC 320 Seven Springs Way, Suite 250, Nashville, Tennessee 37027 YOB: 1955	Trustee	Indefinite term Since inception	Adjunct Lecturer, Bentley University (2016-2022); Adjunct Lecturer, Clarkson University (2016-2023)	3	Steward Funds (2024-Present)

Name, Address and Year of Birth	Position and Offices with Trust	Term of Office and Year First Elected or Appointed	Principal Occupations During Past 5 Years	Number of Portfolios in the Valkyrie Fund Complex Overseen by Trustee	Other Trusteeships or Directorships Held by Trustee During the Past 5 Years
Officers of the Trust					
John Canning c/o Chenery Compliance Group Devon Square II, 744 W Lancaster, Suite 104 Wayne, Pennsylvania 19087 YOB: 1970	Chief Compliance Officer	Indefinite term (since August 2022)	Director of Chenery Compliance Group, LLC (March 2021-present); Senior Consultant of Foreside (August 2020-March 2021); Chief Compliance Officer & Chief Operating Officer of Schneider Capital Management (May 2019-July 2020)	N/A	N/A
Ben Gaffey c/o Valkyrie Funds LLC 320 Seven Springs Way, Suite 250, Nashville, Tennessee 37027 YOB: 1985	Treasurer, Chief Financial Officer and Chief Accounting Officer	Indefinite term Since inception	Controller – US Operations, CoinShares Co. (2024-present); Controller, Valkyrie Investments Inc. (2021-2024); Assurance Senior Manager, Ernst & Young LLP (2016-2021)	N/A	N/A
Andrew Hill c/o Valkyrie Funds LLC 320 Seven Springs Way, Suite 250, Nashville, Tennessee 37027 YOB: 1982	Secretary	Indefinite term (Since December 2022)	Chief Compliance Officer, Valkyrie Funds LLC (2024-present); General Counsel, Executive Vice President, Chief Compliance Officer, Valkyrie Investments Inc. (2022-2024); Frost Brown Todd LLP, Managing Associate (2018-2022)	N/A	N/A

(1) Nick Bonos is deemed an “interested person” of the Trust due to his position as Head of Fund Operations of Valkyrie Funds LLC and Chief Executive Officer and President of the Trust.

Unitary Board Leadership Structure

It is anticipated that each Trustee will serve as a trustee of all funds in the Valkyrie Fund Complex (as defined below), which is known as a “unitary” board leadership structure. Each Trustee currently serves as a trustee of the Fund and is anticipated to serve as a trustee for future Funds advised by Valkyrie (each, a “*Valkyrie Fund*” and collectively, the “*Valkyrie Fund Complex*”). None of the Trustees who are not “interested persons” of the Trust, nor any of their immediate family members, have ever been a director, officer or employee of, or consultant to, Valkyrie or any of its affiliates. Keith Fletcher, an Independent Trustee, serves as the Chair of the Board for each Fund in the Valkyrie Fund Complex.

The same four persons serve as Trustees on the Board and are anticipated to serve on the Boards of all other Valkyrie Funds. The unitary board structure was adopted for the Valkyrie Funds because of the efficiencies it achieves with respect to the governance and oversight of the Valkyrie Funds. Each Valkyrie Fund is subject to the rules and regulations of the 1940 Act (and other applicable securities laws), which means that many of the Valkyrie Funds face similar issues with respect to certain of their fundamental activities, including risk management, portfolio liquidity, portfolio valuation and financial reporting. Because of the similar and often overlapping issues facing the Valkyrie Funds, including among any such ETFs, the Board of Trustees believes that maintaining a unitary board structure promotes efficiency and consistency in the governance and oversight of all Valkyrie Funds and reduces the costs, administrative burdens and possible conflicts that may result from having multiple boards. In adopting a unitary board structure, the Trustees seek to provide effective governance through establishing a board the overall composition of which, as a body, possesses the appropriate skills, diversity, independence and experience to oversee the Fund’s business.

Annually, the Board of Trustees will review its governance structure and the committee structures, its performance and functions and any processes that would enhance board governance over the business of the Valkyrie Funds. The Board of Trustees has determined that its leadership structure, including the unitary board and committee structure, is appropriate based on the characteristics of the funds it serves and the characteristics of the Valkyrie Fund Complex as a whole.

The Board of Trustees has established two standing committees (as described below) and has delegated certain of its responsibilities to those committees. The Board of Trustees and its committees meet frequently throughout the year to oversee the activities of the Fund, review contractual arrangements with and the performance of service providers, oversee compliance with regulatory requirements and review Fund performance. The Independent Trustees are represented by independent legal counsel at all Board and committee meetings. Generally, the Board of Trustees acts by majority vote of the Trustees present at a meeting, assuming a quorum is present, unless otherwise required by applicable law.

The two standing committees of the Board of Trustees are the Nominating and Governance Committee and the Audit Committee.

The Nominating and Governance Committee is responsible for appointing and nominating non-interested persons to the Board of Trustees. Messrs. Fletcher, Lehman and Osterheld are members of the Nominating and Governance Committee. If there is no vacancy on the Board of Trustees, the Board of Trustees will not actively seek recommendations from other parties, including shareholders. The Nominating and Governance Committee will not consider new trustee candidates who are 70 years of age or older or will turn 70 years old during the initial term. When a vacancy on the Board of Trustees occurs and nominations are sought to fill such vacancy, the Nominating and Governance Committee may seek nominations from those sources it deems appropriate in its discretion, including shareholders of the Fund. To submit a recommendation for nomination as a candidate for a position on the Board of Trustees, shareholders of the Fund should mail such recommendation to Andrew Hill, Secretary, at the Trust’s address, 320 Seven Springs Way, Suite 250, Nashville, Tennessee 37027. Such recommendation shall include the following information: (i) a statement in writing setting forth (A) the name, age, date of birth, business address, residence address and nationality of the person or persons to be nominated; (B) the class or series and number of all Shares of the Fund owned of record or beneficially by each such person or persons, as reported to such shareholder by such nominee(s); (C) any other information regarding each such person required by paragraphs (a), (d), (e) and (f) of Item 401 of Regulation S-K or paragraph (b) of Item 22 of Rule 14a-101 (Schedule 14A) under the 1934 Act; (D) any other information regarding the person or persons to be nominated that would be required to be disclosed in a proxy statement or other filings required to be made in connection with solicitation of proxies for election of trustees or directors pursuant to Section 14 of the 1934 Act and the rules and regulations promulgated thereunder; and (E) whether such shareholder believes any nominee is or will be an “interested person” of the Fund (as defined in the 1940 Act) and, if not an “interested person,” information regarding each nominee that will be sufficient for the Fund to make such determination; and (ii) the written and signed consent of any person to be nominated to be named as a nominee and to serve as a trustee if elected. In addition, the Trustees may require any proposed nominee to furnish such other information as they may reasonably require or deem necessary to determine the eligibility of such proposed nominee to serve as a Trustee. The Nominating and Governance Committee met one time during the fiscal year ended September 30, 2024.

The Audit Committee is responsible for overseeing the Fund's accounting and financial reporting process, the system of internal controls and audit process and for evaluating and appointing independent auditors (subject also to approval of the Board of Trustees). Messrs. Fletcher, Lehman and Osterheld serve on the Audit Committee. The Audit Committee met two times during the fiscal year ended September 30, 2024.

Risk Oversight

As part of the general oversight of the Fund, the Board of Trustees is involved in the risk oversight of the Fund. The Board of Trustees has adopted and periodically reviews policies and procedures designed to address the Fund's risks. Oversight of investment and compliance risk, including, if applicable, oversight of any Sub-Adviser, is performed primarily at the Board level in conjunction with the Adviser's investment oversight group and the Trust's Chief Compliance Officer ("CCO"), John Canning.

Oversight of other risks also occurs at the committee level. The Adviser's investment oversight group reports to the Board of Trustees at quarterly meetings regarding, among other things, Fund performance and the various drivers of such performance as well as information related to the Adviser and its operations and processes. The Board of Trustees reviews reports on the Fund's and the service providers' compliance policies and procedures at each quarterly Board meeting and receives an annual report from the CCO regarding the operations of the Fund's and the service providers' compliance programs. In addition, the Independent Trustees meet privately each quarter with the CCO. The Audit Committee reviews with the Adviser the Fund's major financial risk exposures and the steps the Adviser has taken to monitor and control these exposures, including the Fund's risk assessment and risk management policies and guidelines. The Audit Committee also, as appropriate, reviews in a general manner the processes other Board committees have in place with respect to risk assessment and risk management. The Nominating and Governance Committee monitors all matters related to the corporate governance of the Trust.

Not all risks that may affect the Fund can be identified nor can controls be developed to eliminate or mitigate their occurrence or effects. It may not be practical or cost effective to eliminate or mitigate certain risks, the processes and controls employed to address certain risks may be limited in their effectiveness, and some risks are simply beyond the reasonable control of the Fund or the Adviser or other service providers. Moreover, it is necessary to bear certain risks (such as investment-related risks) to achieve the Fund's goals. As a result of the foregoing and other factors, the Fund's ability to manage risk is subject to substantial limitations.

Board Diversification and Trustee Qualifications

As described above, the Nominating and Governance Committee of the Board of Trustees oversees matters related to the nomination of Trustees. The Nominating and Governance Committee seeks to establish an effective Board with an appropriate range of skills and diversity, including, as appropriate, differences in background, professional experience, education, vocations, and other individual characteristics and traits in the aggregate. Each Trustee must meet certain basic requirements, including relevant skills and experience, time availability and, if qualifying as an Independent Trustee, independence from the Adviser, underwriters or other service providers, including any affiliates of these entities.

Listed below for each current Trustee are the experiences, qualifications and attributes that led to the conclusion, as of the date of this SAI, that each current Trustee should serve as a Trustee in light of the Trust's business and structure.

Independent Trustees. Keith Fletcher is the Chair of the Board of Trustees of Valkyrie ETF Trust II. He currently is the Principal and CEO of JAHFT Solutions LLC, a role he has been in since 2017. Additionally, he served as the Principal and Chief Distribution Officer at RiskX Investments from 2012 to 2017, following his role of Chief Marketing Officer at Guggenheim Investments/Rydex SGI from 2008 to 2012. Other experiences include Managing Director, Lyster Watson (2007-2008), President and Chief Executive Officer, Fletcher Financial Group Inc. (2004-2007), and Chief Marketing Officer, Executive Vice President, Van Eck Global (1992-2004). Mr. Fletcher has served as a Trustee of the Valkyrie Funds since 2021.

Steve Lehman is an executive chairman to Vymedic Biotech, a role he has been in since 2019. He also currently serves on the executive board of CoFoundersLab & ZeeWork. In addition, Mr. Lehman has previously served as Chairman CEO of both NASDAQ and New York Stock Exchange. Mr. Lehman has served as a Trustee of the Valkyrie Funds since 2021. He currently serves as the chair of the Nominating Committee (since 2021) of the Valkyrie Funds.

Mark Osterheld served as an Adjunct Lecturer in Accountancy at Bentley University in Waltham, Massachusetts, and Clarkson University in Potsdam, New York. He has been a principal consultant for a consulting firm since 2013. In addition, Mr. Osterheld previously held various leadership roles at Fidelity Investments from 1992 to 2013, including Fund President and Treasurer of the Fidelity Strategic Advisers mutual funds and Vice President — Treasury Oversight. He is a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) and a member of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. Mr. Osterheld has served as a Trustee of the Valkyrie Funds since 2021. He currently serves as the chair of the Audit Committee (since 2021) of the Valkyrie Funds.

Interested Trustees. Nikolaos (Nick) Bonos is the Head of Fund Operations — US of CoinShares Co. Nick has been in the financial services industry for more than 32 years. He has worked in various senior operational roles for State Street, JP Morgan Chase, Rydex Investments, Security Benefit Corp., Guggenheim Investments, and MUFG Investor Services (US), LLC. Mr. Bonos has served as a Trustee of the Valkyrie Funds since 2021.

For the 2025 calendar year, each Independent Trustee is paid a fixed annual retainer of \$25,000. The fixed annual retainer is allocated equally among each Fund in the Valkyrie Fund Complex. Trustees are also reimbursed for travel and out-of-pocket expenses incurred in connection with all meetings.

The following table sets forth the compensation earned by each Independent Trustee (including reimbursement for travel and out-of-pocket expenses) for services to the Fund and the aggregate compensation paid to them for services to the Valkyrie Fund Complex, for the fiscal year ended September 30, 2024. Each Independent Trustee agreed to waive \$6,250 of the \$25,000 fixed annual retainer from the fiscal year ended September 30, 2024. The Trust has no retirement or pension plans. The officers and Trustees who are “interested persons” as designated above serve without any compensation from the Trust. The Trust has no employees. Its officers are compensated by Valkyrie.

Name of Trustee	Compensation from the Fund	Total Compensation from the Valkyrie Fund Complex
Keith Fletcher	\$6,250	\$18,750
Steven Lehman	\$6,250	\$18,750
Mark Osterheld	\$6,250	\$18,750

Interested and Independent Trustees

The following table sets forth the dollar range of equity securities beneficially owned by the Interested and Independent Trustees in the Fund and all funds overseen by the Trustees in the Valkyrie Fund Complex as of December 31, 2024:

Trustee	Dollar Range of Equity Securities in the Fund	Aggregate Dollar Range of Equity Securities in All Registered Investment Companies Overseen by Trustee in the Valkyrie Fund Complex
<i>Interested Trustees</i>		
Nick Bonos	None	\$1–\$10,000
<i>Independent Trustees</i>		
Keith Fletcher	None	None
Steven Lehman	None	None
Mark Osterheld	None	None

As of December 31, 2024, the Independent Trustees of the Trust and immediate family members did not own beneficially or of record any class of securities of an investment adviser or principal underwriter of the Fund or any person directly or indirectly controlling, controlled by, or under common control with an investment adviser or principal underwriter of the Fund.

As of December 31, 2024, the officers and Trustees, in the aggregate, owned less than 1% of the shares of the Fund.

CONTROL PERSONS AND PRINCIPAL HOLDERS OF SECURITIES

A principal shareholder is any person who owns (either of record or beneficially) 5% or more of the outstanding shares of a fund. A control person is one who owns, either directly or indirectly, more than 25% of the voting securities of a company or acknowledges the existence of control. The table set forth below shows the percentage ownership of each person or “group” (as that term is used in Section 13(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended) who, as of January 15, 2025, owned of record, or is known by the Trust to have owned of record or beneficially, 5% or more of the Shares of the Fund.

Shareholders Name and Address	Percentage
National Financial Services LLC 499 Washington Boulevard Jersey City, New Jersey 07310-1995	17.91%
Charles Schwab & Co Inc. 211 Main Street San Francisco, California 94105-1905	16.82%
JP Morgan Chase Bank, National Association 14201 Dallas Parkway, Chase International Plaza Dallas, TX 75254-2916	12.76%
Citibank 3801 Citibank Center B/3 RD Floor/Zone 12 Tampa, Florida 33610	9.61%
Interactive Brokers Group 209 South LaSalle Street Chicago, Illinois 60604	6.32%

INVESTMENT ADVISER AND OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS

Investment Adviser. Valkyrie Funds LLC, 320 Seven Springs Way, Suite 250, Nashville, Tennessee 37027, serves as the investment adviser to the Fund. Valkyrie is a Tennessee limited liability company and a wholly-owned subsidiary of Valkyrie Investments Inc. Valkyrie discharges its responsibilities subject to the policies of the Board of Trustees. Valkyrie also administers the Trust’s business affairs, provides office facilities and equipment and certain clerical, bookkeeping and administrative services, and permits any of its officers or employees to serve without compensation as Trustees or officers of the Trust if elected to such positions.

Pursuant to an investment management agreement between Valkyrie and the Trust, on behalf of the Fund (the “*Investment Management Agreement*”), Valkyrie oversees the investment of the Fund’s assets and is responsible for paying all expenses of the Fund, excluding the fee payments under the Investment Management Agreement, interest, taxes, brokerage commissions, acquired fund fees and expenses and other expenses connected with the execution of portfolio transactions, distribution and service fees payable pursuant to a Rule 12b-1 plan, if any, and extraordinary expenses. The Fund has agreed to pay Valkyrie an annual management fee equal to a percentage of its daily net assets, as detailed in the below table.

Management Fee

Fund	Fee
CoinShares Valkyrie Bitcoin Miners ETF.	0.75%

For the services rendered during the fiscal period ended September 30, 2022, the Adviser received an amount of \$21,500 in management fees paid by the Fund. For the services rendered during the fiscal year ended September 30, 2023, the Adviser received an amount of \$64,862 in management fees paid by the Fund. For the services rendered during the fiscal year ended September 30, 2024, the Adviser received an amount of \$620,126, in management fees paid by the Fund.

Under the Investment Management Agreement, Valkyrie shall not be liable for any loss sustained by reason of the purchase, sale or retention of any security, whether or not such purchase, sale or retention shall have been based upon the investigation and research made by any other individual, firm or corporation, if such recommendation shall have been selected with due care and in good faith, except loss resulting from willful misfeasance, bad faith, or gross negligence on the part of Valkyrie in the performance of its obligations and duties, or by reason of its reckless disregard of its obligations and duties. The Investment Management Agreement is in place for the

original initial two year term, and thereafter only if approved annually by the Board of Trustees, including a majority of the Independent Trustees. The Investment Management Agreement terminates automatically upon assignment and is terminable at any time without penalty as to the Fund by the Board of Trustees, including a majority of the Independent Trustees, or by vote of the holders of a majority of the Fund's outstanding voting securities on 60 days' written notice to Valkyrie, or by Valkyrie on 60 days' written notice to the Fund.

Investment Sub-Adviser. Valkyrie has retained Vident Advisory, LLC (d/b/a Vident Asset Management), 1125 Sanctuary Parkway, Suite 515, Alpharetta, Georgia 30009, to act as sub-adviser to the Fund pursuant to a sub-advisory agreement (the "*Sub-Advisory Agreement*"). Vident serves as investment adviser to high net worth individuals, investment companies, other pooled investment vehicles and other charitable organizations. Vident was formed in 2014 and provides sub-advisory services to multiple ETFs. Vident is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Vident Financial, LLC, which is wholly owned by the Vident Investors' Oversight Trust. The Vident Investors' Oversight Trust is managed by its Trustees, Messrs. Brian L. Shepler, Mohammad I. Baki and Mr. Vince L. Birley.

Pursuant to the Sub-Advisory Agreement, Valkyrie has agreed to pay for the services provided by Vident through sub-advisory fees, which fee is calculated daily and paid monthly, equal to the greater of (1) \$30,000 per annum or (2) 0.05% on the first \$250 million in assets, 0.045% on the next \$250 million in assets, and 0.04% on all assets thereafter. Valkyrie is responsible for paying the entire amount of Vident's fee for the Fund. Vident Investment Advisory, LLC (the "*Prior Sub-Adviser*") received an amount of \$19,397 in sub-advisory fees for the fiscal period ended September 30, 2023, \$24,986 in sub-advisory fees for the fiscal year ended September 30, 2023, and \$48,600 in sub-advisory fees for the fiscal year ended September 30, 2024.

Portfolio Managers. The portfolio managers are primarily responsible for the day-to-day management of the Fund. There are currently four portfolio managers, as follows:

Bill Cannon, ETF Portfolio Manager at Valkyrie, Prior to joining Valkyrie, Bill was a Managing Director at Guggenheim Partners Investment Management, where he was member of the insurance portfolio management division responsible for \$80 billion of assets under management. Before that, Mr. Cannon worked at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange and the Chicago Board Options Exchange as a derivatives broker for equity index and interest rate futures and options. Mr. Cannon earned a BA in Chemistry from the University of Vermont and an MBA from the Quinlan School of Business at Loyola University Chicago.

Rafael Zayas, CFA, Senior Vice President, Head of Portfolio Management and Trading of Vident, Mr. Zayas has over 15 years of trading and portfolio management experience in global equity products and ETFs. He is SVP, Head of Portfolio Management and, specializing in managing and trading of developed, emerging, and frontier market portfolios. Prior to joining Vident, he was a Portfolio Manager at Russell Investments where he oversaw over \$5 billion in quantitative strategies across global markets, including emerging, developed and frontier markets and listed alternatives. Before that, he was an equity Portfolio Manager at BNY Mellon Asset Management, where he was responsible for \$150 million in internationally listed global equity ETFs and assisted in managing \$3 billion of global ETF assets. Mr. Zayas holds a BS in Electrical Engineering from Cornell University. He also holds the Chartered Financial Analyst designation.

Austin Wen, CFA, Senior Portfolio Manager of Vident, Mr. Wen has over a decade of investment experience. At Vident, Mr. Wen specializes in portfolio management and trading of equity, derivative, and commodities-based portfolios, as well as risk monitoring and investment analysis. Previously, he was a financial analyst for Vident Financial, focusing on the development and review of various investment solutions. He began his career as a State Examiner for the Georgia Department of Banking and Finance. Mr. Wen obtained a BA in Finance from the University of Georgia and holds the Chartered Financial Analyst designation.

Compensation. Bill Cannon is compensated by Valkyrie and receives a competitive salary. He may receive bonuses based on qualitative considerations, such as his contribution to the organization, and performance reviews in relation to job responsibilities. Messrs. Zayas and Wen are compensated by Vident. Each is paid a fixed salary and discretionary bonus that is not based on the performance of the Fund.

Ownership of Fund Securities. The following table sets for the dollar range of equity securities beneficially owned by each of the portfolio managers of the Fund as of September 30, 2024:

PORTFOLIO MANAGER	DOLLAR RANGE OF EQUITY SECURITIES IN THE FUND
Bill Cannon	None
Rafael Zayas	None
Austin Wen	None

Accounts Managed by the Portfolio Managers. In addition to the Fund, the portfolio managers are responsible for the day-to-day management of certain other accounts, as listed below. The information below is provided as of September 30, 2023.

Portfolio Managers	Registered Investment Companies Number of Accounts (\$ Assets)	Other Pooled Investment Vehicles Number of Accounts (\$ Assets)	Other Accounts Number of Accounts (\$ Assets)
Bill Cannon	2 (\$63 million)	0 (\$0)	0 (\$0)
Rafael Zayas	40 (\$4,598 million)	14 (\$2,009 million)	1 (\$22 million)
Austin Wen	40 (\$4,153 million)	14 (\$2,009 million)	1 (\$22 million)

Conflicts of Interest. The Sub-Adviser’s portfolio managers’ management of other accounts may give rise to potential conflicts of interest in connection with their management of the Fund’s investments, on the one hand, and the investments of the other accounts, on the other. The other accounts might have similar investment objectives as the Fund or hold, purchase or sell securities that are eligible to be held, purchased or sold by the Fund. While the portfolio managers’ management of other accounts may give rise to the following potential conflicts of interest, the Sub-Adviser does not believe that the conflicts, if any, are material or, to the extent any such conflicts are material, the Sub-Adviser believes that it has designed policies and procedures to manage those conflicts in an appropriate way.

Fund Administration. The administrator, fund accountant and transfer agent for the Fund is U.S. Bancorp Fund Services, LLC (“USBFS”, “Administrator”, “Fund Accountant” or “Transfer Agent”), which has its principal office at 615 East Michigan Street, Milwaukee, WI 53202 and is primarily in the business of providing administrative, fund accounting and stock transfer services to retail and institutional mutual funds. USBFS performs these services pursuant to three separate agreements, a fund administration servicing agreement, a fund accounting servicing agreement and a transfer agent servicing agreement.

Administration Agreement. Pursuant to the fund administration servicing agreement with the Trust (“Administration Agreement”), USBFS provides all administrative services necessary for the Fund, other than those provided by Valkyrie, subject to the supervision of the Board of Trustees. USBFS employees generally will not be officers of the Fund for which they provide services.

The Administration Agreement is terminable by the Board or Valkyrie on ninety (90) days’ written notice and may be assigned provided the non-assigning party provides prior written consent. The Administration Agreement shall remain in effect for three years from the date of its initial approval, unless amended, and its renewal is subject to approval of the Board for periods thereafter. The Administration Agreement provides that in the absence of the USBFS’s refusal or willful failure to comply with the Agreement or bad faith, negligence or willful misconduct on the part of USBFS, USBFS shall not be liable for any action or failure to act in accordance with its duties thereunder.

Under the Administration Agreement, USBFS provides all administrative services, including, without limitation: (i) providing services of persons competent to perform such administrative and clerical functions as are necessary to provide effective administration of the Fund; (ii) overseeing the performance of administrative and professional services to the Fund by others, including the Fund’s custodian, as applicable; (iii) preparing, but not paying for, the periodic updating of the Fund’s Registration Statement, Prospectus and Statement of Additional Information in conjunction with Fund counsel, including the printing of such documents for the purpose of filings with the SEC and state securities administrators, preparing the Fund’s tax returns, and preparing reports to the Fund’s shareholders and the SEC; (iv) calculation of yield and total return for the Fund; (v) monitoring and evaluating daily income and expense accruals, and sales and redemptions of Shares of the Fund; (vi) preparing in conjunction with Fund counsel, but not paying for, all filings under the securities or “Blue Sky” laws of such states or countries as are designated by the Distributor, which may be required to register or qualify, or continue the registration or qualification, of the Fund and/or its Shares under such laws; (vii) preparing notices and agendas for meetings of the Fund’s Board and minutes of such meetings in all matters required by the 1940 Act to be acted upon by the Board; and (viii) monitoring periodic compliance with respect to all requirements and restrictions of the 1940 Act, the Internal Revenue Code and the Prospectus.

Accounting Agreement. Pursuant to the fund accounting servicing agreement with the Trust (the “Fund Accounting Agreement”), USBFS provides the Fund with all accounting services, including, without limitation: (i) daily computation of NAV; (ii) maintenance of security ledgers and books and records as required by the 1940 Act; (iii) production of the Fund’s listing of portfolio securities and general ledger reports; (iv) reconciliation of accounting records; and (v) maintaining certain books and records described in Rule 31a-1 under the 1940 Act, and reconciling account information and balances among the custodian and Valkyrie.

For the administrative and fund accounting services rendered to the Fund by USBFS, USBFS is paid an annual fee based on the average net assets of the Fund, subject to a minimum annual fee. Pursuant to the Fund’s unitary management fee structure, Valkyrie is responsible for paying for the services provided by USBFS, and the Fund does not directly pay USBFS.

Transfer and Dividend Agent. USBFS acts as the Fund's transfer and dividend agent. The Fund pays USBFS for its services as its transfer and dividend agent.

Custodian. U.S. Bank National Association, 1555 North Rivercenter Drive, Suite 302, Milwaukee, WI 53212, serves as custodian (the "*Custodian*") for the Fund's cash and securities. Pursuant to a custodian servicing agreement with the Fund (the "*Custodian Agreement*"), it is responsible for maintaining the books and records of the Fund's portfolio securities and cash. The Custodian does not assist in, and is not responsible for, investment decisions involving the assets of the Fund.

Securities Lending Agent. The Fund may participate in securities lending arrangements whereby the Fund lends certain of its portfolio securities to brokers, dealers, and financial institutions (not with individuals) to receive additional income and increase the rate of return of its portfolio. U.S. Bank, N.A. serves as the Fund's securities lending agent and is responsible for (i) negotiating the fees (rebates) of securities loans within parameters approved by the Board; (ii) delivering loaned securities to the applicable borrower(s), a list of which has been approved by the Board; (iii) investing any cash collateral received for a securities loan in investments pre-approved by the Board; (iv) receiving the returned securities at the expiration of a loan's term; (v) daily monitoring of the value of the loaned securities and the collateral received; (vi) notifying borrowers to make additions to the collateral, when required; (vii) accounting and recordkeeping services as necessary for the operation of the securities lending program, and (viii) establishing and operating a system of controls and procedures to ensure compliance with its obligations under the Fund's securities lending program.

The Fund did not engage in securities lending activities during the fiscal year ended September 30, 2024.

Distributor. ALPS Distributors, Inc. (the "*Distributor*") serves as distributor and principal underwriter of the Creation Units of the Fund. Its principal address is 1290 Broadway, Suite 1000, Denver, Colorado 80203. The Distributor has entered into a Distribution Agreement with the Trust pursuant to which it distributes Fund shares. Shares are continuously offered for sale by the Fund through the Distributor only in Creation Units, as described below under the heading "Creation and Redemption of Creation Units."

Valkyrie may, from time to time and from its own resources, pay, defray or absorb costs relating to distribution, including payments out of its own resources to the Distributor, or to otherwise promote the sale of shares. Valkyrie's available resources to make these payments include profits from advisory fees received from the Fund. The services Valkyrie may pay for include, but are not limited to, advertising and attaining access to certain conferences and seminars, as well as being presented with the opportunity to address investors and industry professionals through speeches and written marketing materials.

Since the inception of the Fund, there has been no underwriting commissions with respect to the sale of Fund Shares, and the Distributor did not receive compensation on redemptions for the Fund for that period.

12b-1 Plan. The Trust has adopted a Plan of Distribution pursuant to Rule 12b-1 under the 1940 Act (the "*Plan*") pursuant to which the Fund may reimburse the Distributor up to a maximum annual rate of 0.25% of its average daily net assets. The Fund does not currently pay, and the Fund has no current intention to pay, 12b-1 fees.

However, in the event 12b-1 fees are charged in the future, under the Plan and as required by Rule 12b-1, the Trustees will receive and review after the end of each calendar quarter a written report provided by the Distributor of the amounts expended under the Plan and the purpose for which such expenditures were made. With the exception of the Distributor and its affiliates, no "interested person" of the Trust (as that term is defined in the 1940 Act) and no Trustee of the Trust has a direct or indirect financial interest in the operation of the Plan or any related agreement.

Aggregations. Shares of the Fund in less than Creation Units are not distributed by the Distributor. The Distributor will deliver the Prospectus and, upon request, this SAI to Authorized Participants purchasing Creation Units and will maintain records of both orders placed with it and confirmations of acceptance furnished by it. The Distributor is a broker-dealer registered under the 1934 Act and a member of the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority ("*FINRA*").

The Distribution Agreement provides that it may be terminated at any time, without the payment of any penalty, on at least 60 days' written notice by the Trust to the Distributor (i) by vote of a majority of the Independent Trustees; or (ii) by vote of a majority of the outstanding voting securities (as defined in the 1940 Act) of the Fund. The Distribution Agreement will terminate automatically in the event of its assignment (as defined in the 1940 Act).

The Distributor may also enter into agreements with participants that utilize the facilities of the Depository Trust Company (the "*DTC Participants*"), which have international, operational, capabilities and place orders for Creation Units of the Fund's shares. Participating Parties (as defined in "Procedures for Creation of Creation Units" below) shall be DTC Participants (as defined in "DTC Acts as Securities Depository for Fund Shares" below).

BROKERAGE ALLOCATIONS

The Sub-Adviser is responsible for decisions to buy and sell securities for the Fund and for the placement of the Fund's securities business, the negotiation of the commissions to be paid on brokered transactions, the prices for principal trades in securities, and the allocation of portfolio brokerage and principal business. It is the policy of Valkyrie to seek the best execution at the best security price available with respect to each transaction, and with respect to brokered transactions in light of the overall quality of brokerage and research services provided to Valkyrie and its clients. The best price to the Fund means the best net price without regard to the mix between purchase or sale price and commission, if any. Purchases may be made from underwriters, dealers, and, on occasion, the issuers. Commissions will be paid on the Fund's futures transactions, if any. The purchase price of portfolio securities purchased from an underwriter or dealer may include underwriting commissions and dealer spreads. The Fund may pay mark-ups on principal transactions. In selecting broker-dealers and in negotiating commissions, the Sub-Adviser considers, among other things, the firm's reliability, the quality of its execution services on a continuing basis and its financial condition.

Section 28(e) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended (the "1934 Act") permits an investment adviser, under certain circumstances, to cause an account to pay a broker or dealer who supplies brokerage and research services a commission for effecting a transaction in excess of the amount of commission another broker or dealer would have charged for effecting the transaction. Brokerage and research services include (i) furnishing advice as to the value of securities, the advisability of investing, purchasing or selling securities, and the availability of securities or purchasers or sellers of securities; (ii) furnishing analyses and reports concerning issuers, industries, securities, economic factors and trends, portfolio strategy, and the performance of accounts; and (iii) effecting securities transactions and performing functions incidental thereto (such as clearance, settlement, and custody). Such brokerage and research services are often referred to as "soft dollars." Valkyrie has advised the Board of Trustees that it does not currently intend to use soft dollars.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, in selecting brokers, the Sub-Adviser may in the future consider investment and market information and other research, such as economic, securities and performance measurement research, provided by such brokers, and the quality and reliability of brokerage services, including execution capability, performance, and financial responsibility. Accordingly, the commissions charged by any such broker may be greater than the amount another firm might charge if the Sub-Adviser determines in good faith that the amount of such commissions is reasonable in relation to the value of the research information and brokerage services provided by such broker to the Sub-Adviser or the Trust. In addition, the Sub-Adviser must determine that the research information received in this manner provides the Fund with benefits by supplementing the research otherwise available to the Fund. The Investment Management Agreement provides that such higher commissions will not be paid by the Fund unless the Adviser determines in good faith that the amount is reasonable in relation to the services provided. The investment advisory fees paid by the Fund to Valkyrie under the Investment Management Agreement would not be reduced as a result of receipt by Valkyrie of research services.

The Sub-Adviser places portfolio transactions for other advisory accounts advised by it, and research services furnished by firms through which the Fund effects securities transactions may be used by the Sub-Adviser in servicing all of its accounts; not all of such services may be used by the Sub-Adviser in connection with the Fund. The Sub-Adviser believes it is not possible to measure separately the benefits from research services to each of the accounts (including the Fund) advised by it. Because the volume and nature of the trading activities of the accounts are not uniform, the amount of commissions in excess of those charged by another broker paid by each account for brokerage and research services will vary. However, the Sub-Adviser believes such costs to the Fund will not be disproportionate to the benefits received by the Fund on a continuing basis. The Sub-Adviser seeks to allocate portfolio transactions equitably whenever concurrent decisions are made to purchase or sell securities by the Fund and another advisory account. In some cases, this procedure could have an adverse effect on the price or the amount of securities available to the Fund. In making such allocations between the Fund and other advisory accounts, the main factors considered by the Sub-Adviser are the respective investment objectives, the relative size of portfolio holding of the same or comparable securities, the availability of cash for investment and the size of investment commitments generally held.

The following table sets forth the amount the Fund paid in brokerage commissions for the three most recent fiscal years:

Brokerage Commissions

Fiscal Period ended September 30, 2022	\$4,669
Fiscal Year ended September 30, 2023	\$7,581
Fiscal Year ended September 30, 2024	\$36,051

For the fiscal period ended September 30, 2022, the fiscal year ended September 30, 2023, and the fiscal year ended September 30, 2024, the Fund did not pay commissions to any affiliated brokers.

Research Services. During the fiscal period ended September 30, 2024, the Fund did not pay commissions to brokers in return for research services.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Book Entry Only System. The following information supplements and should be read in conjunction with the Prospectus.

DTC Acts as Securities Depository for Fund Shares. Shares of the Fund are represented by securities registered in the name of The Depository Trust Company (“DTC”) or its nominee, Cede & Co., and deposited with, or on behalf of, DTC.

DTC, a limited-purpose trust company, was created to hold securities of its participants (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 New York Stock Exchange (the “NYSE”) 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 Shares is limited to DTC Participants, Indirect Participants and persons holding interests through DTC Participants and Indirect Participants. Ownership of beneficial interests in 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 and sale of Shares.

Conveyance of all notices, statements and other communications to Beneficial Owners is effected as follows. Pursuant to a letter agreement between DTC and the Trust, DTC is required to make available to the Trust upon request and for a fee to be charged to the Trust a listing of the Shares of the Fund held by each DTC Participant. The Trust shall inquire of each such DTC Participant as to the number of Beneficial Owners holding 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.

Fund distributions shall be made to DTC or its nominee, as the registered holder of all Fund Shares. DTC or its nominee, upon receipt of any such distributions, shall immediately credit DTC Participants’ accounts with payments in amounts proportionate to their respective beneficial interests in shares of the Fund as shown on the records of DTC or its nominee. Payments by DTC Participants to Indirect Participants and Beneficial Owners of 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 such 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 decide to discontinue providing its service with respect to shares at any time by giving reasonable notice to the Trust and discharging its responsibilities with respect thereto under applicable law. Under such circumstances, the Trust shall take action to find a replacement for DTC to perform its functions at a comparable cost.

Policy Regarding Disclosure of Portfolio Holdings. The Trust has adopted a policy regarding the disclosure of information about the Fund’s portfolio holdings. The Board of Trustees must approve all material amendments to this policy. The Fund’s portfolio holdings are publicly disseminated each day the Fund is open for business through financial reporting and news services, including publicly accessible Internet websites. In addition, a basket composition file, which includes the security names and share quantities to deliver in exchange for Fund Shares, together with estimates and actual cash components, is publicly disseminated each day Nasdaq is open for trading via the National Securities Clearing Corporation (“NSCC”). The basket represents one Creation Unit of the Fund. The Fund’s portfolio holdings are also available on the Fund’s website at <https://coinshares.com/us/etf>. The Trust, Valkyrie, Vident and the Distributor will not disseminate non-public information concerning the Trust.

Quarterly Portfolio Schedule. The Trust is required to disclose on a quarterly basis the complete schedule of the Fund's portfolio holdings with the SEC on Form N-PORT. Form N-PORT for the Trust is available on the SEC's website at <https://www.sec.gov>. The Fund's Form N-PORT may also be reviewed and copied at the SEC's Public Reference Room in Washington, D.C. and information on the operation of the Public Reference Room may be obtained by calling 1-800-SEC-0330. The Trust's Forms N-PORT are available without charge, upon request, by calling 1-800-617-0004 or by writing to Valkyrie ETF Trust II, 320 Seven Springs Way, Suite 250, Nashville, Tennessee 37027.

Codes of Ethics. In order to mitigate the possibility that the Fund will be adversely affected by personal trading, the Trust, Valkyrie, Vident and the Distributor have adopted Codes of Ethics under Rule 17j-1 of the 1940 Act. These Codes of Ethics contain policies restricting securities trading in personal accounts access persons, Trustees and others who normally come into possession of information on portfolio transactions. Personnel subject to the Codes of Ethics may invest in securities that may be purchased or held by the Fund; however, the Codes of Ethics require that each transaction in such securities be reviewed by the Compliance Department. These Codes of Ethics are on public file with, and are available from, the SEC.

PROXY VOTING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The Trust has adopted a proxy voting policy that seeks to ensure that proxies for securities held by the Fund are voted consistently with the best interests of the Fund.

The Board has delegated to Valkyrie the proxy voting responsibilities for the Fund and has directed Valkyrie to vote proxies consistent with the Fund's best interests. Valkyrie has engaged the services of Institutional Shareholder Services Inc. ("ISS") to make recommendations to Valkyrie on the voting of proxies relating to securities held by the Fund. The services provided to Valkyrie through ISS include access to ISS' research analysis and their voting recommendations.

The fundamental guideline followed by Valkyrie in voting proxies is to make every effort to confirm that the manner in which shares are voted is in the best interest of clients and the value of the investment. Absent special circumstances of the types described below, it is the policy of Valkyrie to exercise its proxy voting discretion in accordance with the ISS Proxy Voting Guidelines set forth in Exhibit A.

Information regarding how the Fund voted proxies (if any) relating to portfolio securities during the most recent 12-month period ended June 30 is available upon request and without charge on the Fund's website at <https://coinshares.com/us/etf>, by calling 1-800-617-0004 or by accessing the SEC's website at <https://www.sec.gov>.

CREATION AND REDEMPTION OF CREATION UNITS

General. ETFs, such as the Fund, generally issue and redeem their shares in primary market transactions through a creation and redemption mechanism and do not sell or redeem individual shares. Instead, financial entities known as "Authorized Participants" that have contractual arrangements with an ETF or one of the ETF's service providers to purchase and redeem ETF shares directly with the ETF in large blocks of shares known as "Creation Units." Prior to start of trading on every business day, an ETF publishes through the National Securities Clearing Corporation ("NSCC") the "basket" of securities, cash or other assets that it will accept in exchange for a Creation Unit of the ETF's shares. An Authorized Participant that wishes to effectuate a creation of an ETF's shares deposits with the ETF the "basket" of securities, cash or other assets identified by the ETF that day, and then receives the Creation Unit of the ETF's shares in return for those assets. After purchasing a Creation Unit, the Authorized Participant may continue to hold the ETF's shares or sell them in the secondary market. The redemption process is the reverse of the purchase process: the authorized participant redeems a Creation Unit of ETF shares for a basket of securities, cash or other assets. The combination of the creation and redemption process with secondary market trading in ETF shares and underlying securities provides arbitrage opportunities that are designed to help keep the market price of ETF shares at or close to the NAV per share of the ETF.

Authorized Participants. An "Authorized Participant" is a member or participant of a clearing agency registered with the SEC that has a written agreement with the Fund or one of its service providers that allows the Authorized Participant to place orders for the purchase or redemption of Creation Units (a "Participant Agreement"). Orders to purchase Creation Units must be delivered through an Authorized Participant that has executed a Participant Agreement and must comply with the applicable provisions of such Participant Agreement. Investors wishing to purchase or sell shares generally do so on an exchange. Institutional investors other than Authorized Participants are responsible for making arrangements for a redemption request to be made through an Authorized Participant.

Business Day. A “Business Day” is generally any day on which the New York Stock Exchange (“NYSE”), the Exchange and the Trust are open for business. As of the date of this SAI, the NYSE observes the following holidays: New Year’s Day, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Presidents’ Day, Good Friday, Memorial Day, Juneteenth National Independence Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. The Business Day on which an order to purchase or redeem Creation Units is received in proper form is referred to as the “Transmittal Date.”

Basket Composition. Rule 6c-11(c)(3) under of the 1940 Act requires an ETF relying on the exemptions offered by Rule 6c-11 to adopt and implement written policies and procedures governing the construction of baskets and the process that the ETF will use for the acceptance of baskets. In general, in connection with the construction and acceptance of baskets, the Advisor may consider various factors, including, but not limited to: (1) whether the securities, assets and other positions comprising a basket are consistent with the ETF’s investment objective(s), policies and disclosure; (2) whether the securities, assets and other positions can legally and readily be acquired, transferred and held by the ETF and/or Authorized Participant(s), as applicable; (3) whether to utilize cash, either in lieu of securities or other instruments or as a cash balancing amount; and (4) in the case of an ETF that tracks an index, whether the securities, assets and other positions aid index tracking.

The Fund may utilize a pro-rata basket or a custom basket in reliance on Rule 6c-11. A “pro-rata basket” is a basket that is a pro rata representation of the ETF’s portfolio holdings, except for minor deviations when it is not operationally feasible to include a particular instrument within the basket, except to the extent that the Fund utilized different baskets in transactions on the same Business Day.

Rule 6c-11 defines “custom baskets” to include two categories of baskets. First, a basket containing a non-representative selection of the ETF’s portfolio holdings would constitute a custom basket. These types of custom baskets include, but are not limited to, baskets that do not reflect: (i) a pro rata representation of the Fund’s portfolio holdings; (ii) a representative sampling of an ETF’s portfolio holdings; or (iii) changes due to a rebalancing or reconstitution of an ETF’s securities market index, if applicable. Second, if different baskets are used in transactions on the same Business Day, each basket after the initial basket would constitute a custom basket. For example, if an ETF exchanges a basket with either the same or another Authorized Participant that reflects a representative sampling that differs from the initial basket, that basket (and any such subsequent baskets) would be a custom basket. Similarly, if an ETF substitutes cash in lieu of a portion of basket assets for a single Authorized Participant, that basket would be a custom basket.

Under a variety of circumstances, an ETF and its shareholders may benefit from the flexibility afforded by custom baskets. In general terms, the use of custom baskets may reduce costs, increase efficiency and improve trading. Because utilizing custom baskets provides a way for an ETF to add, remove and re-weight portfolio securities without transacting in the market, it may help the ETF to avoid transaction costs and adverse tax consequences. Rule 6c-11 provides an ETF with flexibility to use “custom baskets” if the ETF has adopted written policies and procedures that: (1) set forth detailed parameters for the construction and acceptance of custom baskets that are in the best interests of the ETF and its shareholders, including the process for any revisions to, or deviations from, those parameters; and (2) specify the titles or roles of employees of the ETF’s investment adviser who are required to review each custom basket for compliance with those parameters.

The use of baskets that do not correspond to pro rata to an ETF’s portfolio holdings has historically created concern that an Authorized Participant could take advantage of its relationship with an ETF and pressure the ETF to construct a basket that favors an Authorized Participant to the detriment of the ETF’s shareholders. For example, because ETFs rely on Authorized Participants to maintain the secondary market by promoting an effective arbitrage mechanism, an Authorized Participant holding less liquid or less desirable securities potentially could pressure an ETF into accepting those securities in its basket in exchange for liquid ETF shares (*i.e.*, dumping). An Authorized Participant also could pressure the ETF into including in its basket certain desirable securities in exchange for ETF shares tendered for redemption (*i.e.*, cherry-picking). In either case, the ETF’s other investors would be disadvantaged and would be left holding shares of an ETF with a less liquid or less desirable portfolio of securities. The Adviser has adopted policies and procedures designed to mitigate these concerns but there is ultimately no guarantee that such policies and procedures will be effective.

Basket Dissemination. Basket files are published for consumption through the NSCC, a subsidiary of Depository Trust & Clearing Corporation, and can be utilized for pricing, creations, redemptions, rebalancing and custom scenarios. In most instances, pro rata baskets are calculated and supplied by the ETF’s custodial bank based on ETF holdings, whereas non-pro rata, custom and forward-looking pro rata baskets are calculated by the Fund’s investment adviser and disseminated by the ETF’s custodial bank through the NSCC process.

Placement of Creation or Redemption Orders. All orders to purchase or redeem Creation Units are to be governed according to the applicable Participant Agreement that each Authorized Participant has executed. In general, all orders to purchase or redeem Creation Units must be received by the transfer agent in the proper form required by the Participant Agreement no later than the closing time of the regular trading session of the NYSE (ordinarily 4:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time) on each day the NYSE is open for business (the “Closing Time”) in order for the purchase or redemption of Creation Units to be effected based on the NAV of shares of the Fund as next

determined on such date after receipt of the order in proper form. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Fund may, but is not required to permit orders until 4:00 p.m., Eastern time, or until the market closes (in the event the Exchange closes early). However, at its discretion, the Fund may require an Authorized Participant to submit orders to purchase or redeem Creation Units be placed earlier in the day (such as instances where an applicable market for a security comprising a creation or redemption basket closes earlier than usual).

Delivery of Redemption Proceeds. Deliveries of securities to Authorized Participants in connection with redemption orders are generally expected to be made within two Business Days. Due to the schedule of holidays in certain countries, however, the delivery of in-kind redemption proceeds for the Fund may take longer than two Business Days after the day on which the redemption request is received in proper form. Section 22(e) of the 1940 Act generally prohibits a registered open-end management investment company from postponing the date of satisfaction of redemption requests for more than seven days after the tender of a security for redemption. This prohibition can cause operational difficulties for ETFs that hold foreign investments and exchange in-kind baskets for Creation Units. For example, local market delivery cycles for transferring foreign investments to redeeming investors, together with local market holiday schedules, can sometimes require a delivery process in excess of seven days. However, Rule 6c-11 grants relief from Section 22(e) to permit an ETF to delay satisfaction of a redemption request for more than seven days if a local market holiday, or series of consecutive holidays, or the extended delivery cycles for transferring foreign investments to redeeming Authorized Participants, or the combination thereof prevents timely delivery of the foreign investment included in the ETF's basket. Under this exemption, an ETF must deliver foreign investments as soon as practicable, but in no event later than 15 days after the tender to the ETF. The exemption therefore will permit a delay only to the extent that additional time for settlement is actually required, when a local market holiday, or series of consecutive holidays, or the extended delivery cycles for transferring foreign investments to redeeming authorized participants prevents timely delivery of the foreign investment included in the ETF's basket. If a foreign investment settles in less than 15 days, Rule 6c-11 requires an ETF to deliver it pursuant to the standard settlement time of the local market where the investment trades. Rule 6c-11 defines "foreign investment" as any security, asset or other position of the ETF issued by a foreign issuer (as defined by Rule 3b-4 under the 1934 Act), and that is traded on a trading market outside of the United States. This definition is not limited to "foreign securities," but also includes other investments that may not be considered securities. Although these other investments may not be securities, they may present the same challenges for timely settlement as foreign securities if they are transferred in kind.

Creation Transaction Fees. The Fund imposes fees in connection with the purchase of Creation Units. These fees may vary based upon various facts-based circumstances, including, but not limited to, the composition of the securities included in the Creation Unit or the countries in which the transactions are settled. The price for each Creation Unit will equal the daily NAV per share of the Fund times the number of shares in a Creation Unit, plus the fees described above and, if applicable, any operational processing and brokerage costs, transfer fees, stamp taxes and part or all of the spread between the expected bid and offer side of the market related to the securities comprising the creation basket.

Redemption Transaction Fees. The Fund also imposes fees in connection with the redemption of Creation Units. These fees may vary based upon various facts-based circumstances, including, but not limited to, the composition of the securities included in the Creation Unit or the countries in which the transactions are settled. The price received for each Creation Unit will equal the daily NAV per share of the Fund times the number of shares in a Creation Unit, minus the fees described above and, if applicable, any operational processing and brokerage costs, transfer fees, stamp taxes and part or all of the spread between the expected bid and offer side of the market related to the securities comprising the redemption basket. Investors who use the services of a broker or other such intermediary in addition to an Authorized Participant to effect a redemption of a Creation Unit may also be assessed an amount to cover the cost of such services. The redemption fee charged by the Fund will comply with Rule 22c-2 of the 1940 Act which limits redemption fees to no more than 2% of the value of the shares redeemed.

Acceptance of Creation Orders. The Fund will accept all orders for Creation Units that are in good order. Circumstances under which the Fund may not accept a creation order include, but are not limited to: (i) the order is not in proper form; (ii) the purchaser or group of related purchasers, upon obtaining the Creation Units of Fund shares ordered, would own 80% or more of the currently outstanding shares of the Fund; (iii) the required consideration is not delivered; (iv) the acceptance of the Fund Deposit would, in the opinion of the Fund, be unlawful; or (v) there exist circumstances outside the control of the Fund that make it impossible to process orders of Creation Units for all practical purposes. Examples of such circumstances include: acts of God 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 Fund, Valkyrie, the Distributor, DTC, NSCC, the transfer agent, the custodian, any sub-custodian or any other participant in the purchase process; and similar extraordinary events. The Transfer Agent shall notify a prospective creator of a Creation Unit and/or the Authorized Participant acting on behalf of such prospective creator of the rejection of the order of such person. The Trust, the Fund, the Transfer Agent, the custodian, any sub-custodian and the Distributor are under no duty, however, to give notification of any defects or irregularities in the delivery of Fund Deposits, nor shall any of them incur any liability for the failure to give any such notification.

Acceptance of Redemption Orders. An ETF may suspend the redemption of Creation Units only in accordance with Section 22(e) of the 1940 Act. Section 22(e) stipulates that no registered investment company shall suspend the right of redemption, or postpone the date of payment or satisfaction upon redemption of any redeemable security in accordance with its terms for more than seven days after the tender of such security to the company or its agent designated for that purpose for redemption, except (1) for any period (A) during which the NYSE is closed other than customary week-end and holiday closings or (B) during which trading on the NYSE is restricted; (2) for any period during which an emergency exists as a result of which (A) disposal by the investment company of securities owned by it is not reasonably practicable or (B) it is not reasonably practicable for such company fairly to determine the value of its net assets; or (3) for such other periods as the SEC may by order permit for the protection of security holders of the investment company.

Exceptions to Use of Creation Units. Under Rule 6c-11 of the 1940 Act, ETFs are permitted to sell or redeem individual shares on the day of consummation of a reorganization, merger, conversion, or liquidation. In these limited circumstances, an ETF may need to issue or redeem individual shares and may need to transact without utilizing Authorized Participants.

FEDERAL TAX MATTERS

This section summarizes some of the main U.S. federal income tax consequences of owning Shares of the Fund. This section is current as of the date of this SAI. Tax laws and interpretations change frequently, and these summaries do not describe all of the tax consequences to all taxpayers. For example, these summaries generally do not describe your situation if you are a corporation, a non-U.S. person, a broker-dealer, or other investor with special circumstances. In addition, this section does not describe your state, local or foreign tax consequences.

This federal income tax summary is based in part on the advice of counsel to the Fund. The Internal Revenue Service could disagree with any conclusions set forth in this section. In addition, our counsel was not asked to review, and has not reached a conclusion with respect to the federal income tax treatment of the assets to be deposited in the Fund. This may not be sufficient for prospective investors to use for the purpose of avoiding penalties under federal tax law.

As with any investment, prospective investors should seek advice based on their individual circumstances from their own tax adviser.

The Fund intends to qualify annually and to elect to be treated as a regulated investment company under the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended (the “Code”).

To qualify for the favorable U.S. federal income tax treatment generally accorded to regulated investment companies, the Fund must, among other things, (i) derive in each taxable year at least 90% of its gross income from dividends, interest, payments with respect to securities loans and gains from the sale or other disposition of stock, securities or foreign currencies or other income derived with respect to its business of investing in such stock, securities or currencies, or net income derived from interests in certain publicly traded partnerships; (ii) diversify its holdings so that, at the end of each quarter of the taxable year, (a) at least 50% of the market value of the Fund’s assets is represented by cash and cash items (including receivables), U.S. government securities, the securities of other regulated investment companies and other securities, with such other securities of any one issuer generally limited for the purposes of this calculation to an amount not greater than 5% of the value of the Fund’s total assets and not greater than 10% of the outstanding voting securities of such issuer, and (b) not more than 25% of the value of its total assets is invested in the securities (other than U.S. government securities or the securities of other regulated investment companies) of any one issuer, or two or more issuers which the Fund controls which are engaged in the same, similar or related trades or businesses, or the securities of one or more of certain publicly traded partnerships; and (iii) distribute at least 90% of its investment company taxable income (which includes, among other items, dividends, interest and net short-term capital gains in excess of net long-term capital losses) and at least 90% of its net tax-exempt interest income each taxable year. There are certain exceptions for failure to qualify if the failure is for reasonable cause or is *de minimis*, and certain corrective action is taken and certain tax payments are made by the Fund.

As a regulated investment company, the Fund generally will not be subject to U.S. federal income tax on its investment company taxable income (as that term is defined in the Code, but without regard to the deduction for dividends paid) and net capital gain (the excess of net long-term capital gain over net short-term capital loss), if any, that it distributes to shareholders. The Fund intends to distribute to its shareholders, at least annually, substantially all of its investment company taxable income and net capital gain. If the Fund retains any net capital gain or investment company taxable income, it will generally be subject to federal income tax at regular corporate rates on the amount retained. In addition, amounts not distributed on a timely basis in accordance with a calendar year distribution requirement are subject to a nondeductible 4% excise tax unless, generally, the Fund distributes during each calendar year an amount equal to the sum of (1) at least 98% of its ordinary income (not taking into account any capital gains or losses) for the calendar year, (2) at least 98.2% of its capital gains in excess of its capital losses (adjusted for certain ordinary losses) for the one-year period ending October 31 of the calendar year, and (3) any ordinary income and capital gains for previous years that were not distributed during those years. In order to prevent application of the excise tax, the Fund intends to make its distributions in accordance with the calendar year distribution

requirement. A distribution will be treated as paid on December 31 of the current calendar year if it is declared by the Fund in October, November or December with a record date in such a month and paid by the Fund during January of the following calendar year. Such distributions will be taxable to shareholders in the calendar year in which the distributions are declared, rather than the calendar year in which the distributions are received.

Subject to certain reasonable cause and *de minimis* exceptions, if the Fund fails to qualify as a regulated investment company or failed to satisfy the 90% distribution requirement in any taxable year, the Fund would be taxed as an ordinary corporation on its taxable income (even if such income were distributed to its shareholders) and all distributions out of earnings and profits would be taxed to shareholders as ordinary income.

Distributions

Dividends paid out of the Fund's investment company taxable income are generally taxable to a shareholder as ordinary income to the extent of the Fund's earnings and profits, whether paid in cash or reinvested in additional shares. However, certain ordinary income distributions received from the Fund may be taxed at capital gains tax rates. In particular, ordinary income dividends received by an individual shareholder from a regulated investment company such as the Fund are generally taxed at the same rates that apply to net capital gain, *provided* that certain holding period requirements are satisfied and provided the dividends are attributable to qualifying dividends received by the Fund itself.

The Fund will provide notice to its shareholders of the amount of any distributions that may be taken into account as a dividend, which is eligible for the capital gains tax rates. The Fund cannot make any guarantees as to the amount of any distribution, which will be regarded as a qualifying dividend.

Income from the Fund may also be subject to a 3.8% "Medicare tax." This tax generally applies to net investment income if the taxpayer's adjusted gross income exceeds certain threshold amounts, which are \$250,000 in the case of married couples filing joint returns and \$200,000 in the case of single individuals.

A corporation that owns Shares generally will not be entitled to the dividends received deduction with respect to many dividends received from the Fund because the dividends received deduction is generally not available for distributions from regulated investment companies. However, certain ordinary income dividends on Shares that are attributable to qualifying dividends received by the Fund from certain domestic corporations may be reported by the Fund as being eligible for the dividends received deduction.

Distributions of net capital gain (the excess of net long-term capital gain over net short-term capital loss), if any, properly reported as capital gain dividends are taxable to a shareholder as long-term capital gains, regardless of how long the shareholder has held Fund Shares. An election may be available to you to defer recognition of the gain attributable to a capital gain dividend if you make certain qualifying investments within a limited time. You should talk to your tax adviser about the availability of this deferral election and its requirements. Shareholders receiving distributions in the form of additional Shares, rather than cash, generally will have a tax basis in each such share equal to the value of a Share of the Fund on the reinvestment date. A distribution of an amount in excess of the Fund's current and accumulated earnings and profits will be treated by a shareholder as a return of capital which is applied against and reduces the shareholder's basis in his or her Shares. To the extent that the amount of any such distribution exceeds the shareholder's basis in his or her Shares, the excess will be treated by the shareholder as gain from a sale or exchange of the Shares.

Shareholders will be notified annually as to the U.S. federal income tax status of distributions, and shareholders receiving distributions in the form of additional shares will receive a report as to the value of those Shares.

Sale or Exchange of Fund Shares

Upon the sale or other disposition of Shares of the Fund, which a shareholder holds as a capital asset, such a shareholder may realize a capital gain or loss, which will be long-term or short-term, depending upon the shareholder's holding period for the Shares. Generally, a shareholder's gain or loss will be a long-term gain or loss if the Shares have been held for more than one year.

Any loss realized on a sale or exchange will be disallowed to the extent that Shares disposed of are replaced (including through reinvestment of dividends) within a period of 61 days beginning 30 days before and ending 30 days after disposition of shares or to the extent that the shareholder, during such period, acquires or enters into an option or contract to acquire, substantially identical stock or securities. In such a case, the basis of the shares acquired will be adjusted to reflect the disallowed loss. Any loss realized by a shareholder on a disposition of Fund Shares held by the shareholder for six months or less will be treated as a long-term capital loss to the extent of any distributions of long-term capital gain received by the shareholder with respect to such Shares.

Taxes on Purchase and Redemption of Creation Units

If a shareholder exchanges securities for Creation Units the shareholder will generally 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 and the shareholder's aggregate basis in the securities surrendered and the Cash Component paid. If a shareholder exchanges Creation Units for securities, then the shareholder will generally recognize a gain or loss equal to the difference between the shareholder's basis in the Creation Units and the aggregate market value of the securities received and the Cash Redemption Amount. The Internal Revenue Service, however, may assert that a loss realized upon an exchange of securities for Creation Units or Creation Units for securities cannot be deducted currently under the rules governing "wash sales," or on the basis that there has been no significant change in economic position.

Nature of Fund Investments

Certain of the Fund's investment practices are subject to special and complex federal income tax provisions that may, among other things, (i) disallow, suspend or otherwise limit the allowance of certain losses or deductions; (ii) convert lower taxed long-term capital gain into higher taxed short-term capital gain or ordinary income; (iii) convert an ordinary loss or a deduction into a capital loss (the deductibility of which is more limited); (iv) cause the Fund to recognize income or gain without a corresponding receipt of cash; (v) adversely affect the time as to when a purchase or sale of stock or securities is deemed to occur; and (vi) adversely alter the characterization of certain complex financial transactions.

Futures Contracts and Options

The Fund's transactions in futures contracts and options will be subject to special provisions of the Code that, among other things, may affect the character of gains and losses realized by the Fund (*i.e.*, may affect whether gains or losses are ordinary or capital, or short-term or long-term), may accelerate recognition of income to the Fund and may defer Fund losses. These rules could, therefore, affect the character, amount and timing of distributions to shareholders. These provisions also (a) will require the Fund to mark-to-market certain types of the positions in its portfolio (*i.e.*, treat them as if they were closed out), and (b) may cause the Fund to recognize income without receiving cash with which to make distributions in amounts necessary to satisfy the 90% distribution requirement for qualifying to be taxed as a regulated investment company and the distribution requirements for avoiding excise taxes.

Investments in Certain Non-U.S. Corporations

If the Fund holds an equity interest in any "passive foreign investment companies" ("*PFICs*"), which are generally certain non-U.S. corporations that receive at least 75% of their annual gross income from passive sources (such as interest, dividends, certain rents and royalties or capital gains) or that hold at least 50% of their assets in investments producing such passive income, the Fund could be subject to U.S. federal income tax and additional interest charges on gains and certain distributions with respect to those equity interests, even if all the income or gain is timely distributed to its shareholders. The Fund will not be able to pass through to its shareholders any credit or deduction for such taxes. The Fund may be able to make an election that could ameliorate these adverse tax consequences. In this case, the Fund would recognize as ordinary income any increase in the value of such PFIC shares, and as ordinary loss any decrease in such value to the extent it did not exceed prior increases included in income. Under this election, the Fund might be required to recognize in a year income in excess of its distributions from PFICs and its proceeds from dispositions of PFIC stock during that year, and such income would nevertheless be subject to the distribution requirement and would be taken into account for purposes of the 4% excise tax (described above). Dividends paid by PFICs are not treated as qualified dividend income.

Backup Withholding

The Fund may be required to withhold U.S. federal income tax from all taxable distributions and sale proceeds payable to shareholders who fail to provide the Fund with their correct taxpayer identification number or fail to make required certifications, or who have been notified by the Internal Revenue Service that they are subject to backup withholding. Corporate shareholders and certain other shareholders specified in the Code generally are exempt from such backup withholding. This withholding is not an additional tax. Any amounts withheld may be credited against the shareholder's U.S. federal income tax liability.

Non-U.S. Shareholders

U.S. taxation of a shareholder who, as to the United States, is a nonresident alien individual, a non-U.S. trust or estate, a non-U.S. corporation or non-U.S. partnership ("*non-U.S. shareholder*") depends on whether the income of the Fund is "effectively connected" with a U.S. trade or business carried on by the shareholder.

In addition to the rules described in this section concerning the potential imposition of withholding on distributions to non-U.S. persons, distributions to non-U.S. persons that are “financial institutions” may be subject to a withholding tax of 30% unless an agreement is in place between the financial institution and the U.S. Treasury to collect and disclose information about accounts, equity investments, or debt interests in the financial institution held by one or more U.S. persons or the institution is resident in a jurisdiction that has entered into such an agreement with the U.S. Treasury. For these purposes, a “financial institution” means any entity that (i) accepts deposits in the ordinary course of a banking or similar business; (ii) holds financial assets for the account of others as a substantial portion of its business; or (iii) is engaged (or holds itself out as being engaged) primarily in the business of investing, reinvesting or trading in securities, partnership interests, commodities or any interest (including a futures contract or option) in such securities, partnership interests or commodities. This withholding tax is also currently scheduled to apply to the gross proceeds from the disposition of securities that produce U.S. source interest or dividends. However, proposed regulations may eliminate the requirement to withhold on payments of gross proceeds from dispositions.

Distributions to non-financial non-U.S. entities (other than publicly traded non-U.S. entities, entities owned by residents of U.S. possessions, non-U.S. governments, international organizations, or non-U.S. central banks), will also be subject to a withholding tax of 30% if the entity does not certify that the entity does not have any substantial U.S. owners or provide the name, address and TIN of each substantial U.S. owner. This withholding tax is also currently scheduled to apply to the gross proceeds from the disposition of securities that produce U.S. source interest or dividends. However, proposed regulations may eliminate the requirement to withhold on payments of gross proceeds from dispositions.

Income Not Effectively Connected. If the income from the Fund is not “effectively connected” with a U.S. trade or business carried on by the non-U.S. shareholder, distributions of investment company taxable income will generally be subject to a U.S. tax of 30% (or lower treaty rate), which tax is generally withheld from such distributions.

Distributions of capital gain dividends and any amounts retained by the Fund which are properly reported by the Fund as undistributed capital gains will not be subject to U.S. tax at the rate of 30% (or lower treaty rate) unless the non-U.S. shareholder is a nonresident alien individual and is physically present in the United States for more than 182 days during the taxable year and meets certain other requirements. However, this 30% tax on capital gains of nonresident alien individuals who are physically present in the United States for more than the 182 day period only applies in exceptional cases because any individual present in the United States for more than 182 days during the taxable year is generally treated as a resident for U.S. income tax purposes; in that case, he or she would be subject to U.S. income tax on his or her worldwide income at the graduated rates applicable to U.S. citizens, rather than the 30% U.S. tax. In the case of a non-U.S. shareholder who is a nonresident alien individual, the Fund may be required to withhold U.S. income tax from distributions of net capital gain unless the non-U.S. shareholder certifies his or her non-U.S. status under penalties of perjury or otherwise establishes an exemption. If a non-U.S. shareholder is a nonresident alien individual, any gain such shareholder realizes upon the sale or exchange of such shareholder’s Shares of the Fund in the United States will ordinarily be exempt from U.S. tax unless the gain is U.S. source income and such shareholder is physically present in the United States for more than 182 days during the taxable year and meets certain other requirements.

Distributions from the Fund that are properly reported by the Fund as an interest-related dividend attributable to certain interest income received by the Fund or as a short-term capital gain dividend attributable to certain net short-term capital gain income received by the Fund may not be subject to U.S. federal income taxes, including withholding taxes when received by certain non-U.S. investors, provided that the Fund makes certain elections and certain other conditions are met.

In addition, capital gain distributions attributable to gains from U.S. real property interests (including certain U.S. real property holding corporations) will generally be subject to United States withholding tax and will give rise to an obligation on the part of the non-U.S. shareholder to file a United States tax return.

Income Effectively Connected. If the income from the Fund is “effectively connected” with a U.S. trade or business carried on by a non-U.S. shareholder, then distributions of investment company taxable income and capital gain dividends, any amounts retained by the Fund which are properly reported by the Fund as undistributed capital gains and any gains realized upon the sale or exchange of Shares of the Fund will be subject to U.S. income tax at the graduated rates applicable to U.S. citizens, residents and domestic corporations. Non-U.S. corporate shareholders may also be subject to the branch profits tax imposed by the Code. The tax consequences to a non-U.S. shareholder entitled to claim the benefits of an applicable tax treaty may differ from those described herein. Non-U.S. shareholders are advised to consult their own tax advisers with respect to the particular tax consequences to them of an investment in the Fund.

Other Taxation

Fund shareholders may be subject to state, local and foreign taxes on their Fund distributions. Shareholders are advised to consult their own tax advisers with respect to the particular tax consequences to them of an investment in the Fund.

Capital Loss Carryforward

As of September 30, 2024, for federal income tax purposes, the Fund had capital loss carryforwards available to offset future capital gains as indicated in the table below.

Fund	Short-Term	Long-Term	Expires
CoinShares Valkyrie Bitcoin Miners ETF	\$5,369,688	\$548,272	—

DETERMINATION OF NET ASSET VALUE

The following information supplements and should be read in conjunction with the section in the Prospectus entitled “Net Asset Value.”

The per Share NAV of the Fund is determined by dividing the total value of the securities and other assets, less liabilities, by the total number of shares outstanding. Market value prices represent last sale or official closing prices from a national or foreign exchange (*i.e.*, a regulated market) and are primarily obtained from third party pricing services. Under normal circumstances, daily calculation of the net asset value will utilize the last closing price of each security held by the Fund at the close of the market on which such security is principally listed. In determining NAV, portfolio securities for the Fund for which accurate market quotations are readily available will be valued by the Fund accounting agent as follows:

(1) Common stocks and other equity securities listed on any national or foreign exchange other than NASDAQ and the London Stock Exchange Alternative Investment Market (“*AIM*”) will be valued at the last sale price on the business day as of which such value is being determined. Securities listed on NASDAQ or AIM are valued at the official closing price on the business day as of which such value is being determined. If there has been no sale on such day, or no official closing price in the case of securities traded on NASDAQ and AIM, the securities are valued at the midpoint between the most recent bid and ask prices on such day. Portfolio securities traded on more than one securities exchange are valued at the last sale price or official closing price, as applicable, on the business day as of which such value is being determined at the close of the exchange representing the principal market for such securities.

(2) Securities traded in the OTC market are valued at the midpoint between the bid and asked price, if available, and otherwise at their closing bid prices.

In addition, the following types of securities will be valued as follows:

(1) Fixed income securities will be valued by the fund accounting agent using a pricing service. When price quotes are not available, fair value is based on prices of comparable securities.

The value of any portfolio security held by the Fund for which market quotations are not readily available will be determined by Valkyrie in a manner that most fairly reflects fair market value of the security on the valuation date, based on a consideration of all available information.

Certain securities may not be able to be priced by pre-established pricing methods. Such securities may be valued by the Board of Trustees or its delegate at fair value. These securities generally include but are not limited to, restricted securities (securities which may not be publicly sold without registration under the 1933 Act) for which a pricing service is unable to provide a market price; securities whose trading has been formally suspended; a security whose market price is not available from a pre-established pricing source; a security with respect to which an event has occurred that is likely to materially affect the value of the security after the market has closed but before the calculation of Fund net asset value (as may be the case in foreign markets on which the security is primarily traded) or make it difficult or impossible to obtain a reliable market quotation; and a security whose price, as provided by the pricing service, does not reflect the security’s “fair value.” As a general principle, the current “fair value” of an issue of securities would appear to be the amount, that the owner might reasonably expect to receive for them upon their current sale. A variety of factors may be considered in determining the fair value of such securities. Rule 2a-5 addresses a board’s valuation policies and the role of the board with respect to the fair value of a fund’s investments. It further provides requirements for determining fair value in good faith under the 1940 Act. The Board of Trustees has designated the Adviser as “valuation designee” to perform fair value determinations for all of the Funds’ investments pursuant to Rule 2a-5 under the Investment Company Act of 1940, as amended. The Board of Trustees will oversee the Adviser’s fair value determinations and its performance as valuation designee.

Valuing the Fund’s investments using fair value pricing will result in using prices for those investments that may differ from current market valuations. Use of fair value prices and certain current market valuations could result in a difference between the prices used to calculate the Fund’s NAV and the prices used in secondary market transactions.

Because foreign markets may be open on different days than the days during which a shareholder may purchase the shares of the Fund, the value of the Fund's investments may change on the days when shareholders are not able to purchase the shares of the Fund.

The Fund may suspend the right of redemption for the Fund only under the following unusual circumstances: (i) when the NYSE is closed (other than weekends and holidays) or trading is restricted; (ii) when trading in the markets normally utilized is restricted, or when an emergency exists as determined by the SEC so that disposal of the Fund's investments or determination of its net assets is not reasonably practicable; or (iii) during any period when the SEC may permit.

DIVIDENDS AND DISTRIBUTIONS

The following information supplements and should be read in conjunction with the section in the Prospectus entitled "Dividends, Distributions and Taxes."

General Policies. Dividends from net investment income of the Fund, if any, are declared and paid at least annually. Distributions of net realized securities gains, if any, generally are declared and paid once a year, but the Trust may make distributions on a more frequent basis. The Trust reserves the right to declare special distributions if, in its reasonable discretion, such action is necessary or advisable to preserve the status of the Fund as a regulated investment company or to avoid imposition of income or excise taxes on undistributed income.

Dividends and other distributions of Fund shares are distributed, as described below, on a pro rata basis to Beneficial Owners of such shares. Dividend payments are made through DTC Participants and Indirect Participants to Beneficial Owners then of record with proceeds received from the Fund.

Dividend Reinvestment Service. No reinvestment service is provided by the Trust. Broker-dealers may make available the DTC book-entry Dividend Reinvestment Service for use by Beneficial Owners of the Fund for reinvestment of their dividend distributions. Beneficial Owners should contact their brokers in order to determine the availability and costs of the service and the details of participation therein. Brokers may require Beneficial Owners to adhere to specific procedures and timetables. If this service is available and used, dividend distributions of both income and realized gains will be automatically reinvested in additional whole shares of the Fund purchased in the secondary market.

MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

Counsel. Chapman and Cutler LLP, 320 South Canal Street, Chicago, Illinois 60606, is counsel to the Trust.

Independent Registered Public Accounting Firm. Cohen & Company, Ltd., 342 North Water Street, Suite 830, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202, serves as the Fund's independent registered public accounting firm. The firm audits the Fund's financial statements and performs other related audit services.

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

To obtain the Fund's most current performance information, please call 1-800-617-0004 or visit the Fund's website at <https://coinshares.com/us/etf>. From time to time, the Fund's performance information, such as yield or total return, may be quoted in advertisements or in communications to present or prospective shareholders. Performance quotations represent the Fund's past performance and should not be considered as representative of future results. The Fund will calculate its performance in accordance with the requirements of the rules and regulations under the 1940 Act, as they may be revised from time to time.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The audited financial statements and notes thereto in the Fund's Annual Report to Shareholders for the fiscal year ended September 30, 2024 (the "Annual Report") are incorporated by reference into this SAI. No other parts of the Annual Report are incorporated by reference herein. The financial statements included in the Annual Report have been audited by Cohen & Company, Ltd., each Fund's independent registered public accounting firm, whose report thereon also appears in the Annual Report and is incorporated by reference into this SAI. A copy of the Annual Report for the fiscal year ended September 30, 2024 may be obtained upon request and without charge by writing or calling Valkyrie Funds LLC at 320 Seven Springs Way, Suite 250, Nashville, Tennessee 37027 or by calling 1-800-617-0004.

EXHIBIT A – PROXY VOTING GUIDELINES



UNITED STATES

SUSTAINABILITY PROXY VOTING GUIDELINES

2024 Policy Recommendations

Published January 2024

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	8
1. Routine/Miscellaneous	9
Adjourn Meeting	9
Amend Quorum Requirements	9
Amend Minor Bylaws	9
Change Company Name	9
Change Date, Time, or Location of Annual Meeting.....	9
Other Business	10
Audit-Related.....	10
Auditor Indemnification and Limitation of Liability.....	10
Auditor Ratification	10
Shareholder Proposals Limiting Non-Audit Services	11
Shareholder Proposals on Audit Firm Rotation	11
2. Board of Directors	12
Voting on Director Nominees in Uncontested Elections	12
Accountability.....	12
Problematic Takeover Defenses, Capital Structure, and Governance Structures	12
Problematic Audit-Related Practices	15
Problematic Compensation Practices.....	15
Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Failures	16
Climate Risk Mitigation and Net Zero	16
Responsiveness	17
Composition	18
Gender Diversity.....	18
Racial and/or Ethnic Diversity.....	18
Independence.....	19
Sustainability Policy Classification of Directors — U.S.....	19
Other Board — Related Proposals.....	21
Board Refreshment.....	21
Board Size	22
Classification/Declassification of the Board	22
CEO Succession Planning	22
Cumulative Voting	22
Director and Officer Indemnification, Liability Protection, and Exculpation	23
Establish/Amend Nominee Qualifications	23
Establish Other Board Committee Proposals	24
Filling Vacancies/Removal of Directors.....	24
Independent Board Chair	24
Majority of Independent Directors/Establishment of Independent Committees	24
Majority Vote Standard for the Election of Directors	25

Proxy Access	25
Require More Nominees than Open Seats	25
Shareholder Engagement Policy (Shareholder Advisory Committee)	25
Proxy Contests/Proxy Access — Voting for Director Nominees in Contested Elections	26
Vote-No Campaigns	26
3. Shareholder Rights & Defenses	27
Advance Notice Requirements for Shareholder Proposals/Nominations	27
Amend Bylaws without Shareholder Consent	27
Control Share Acquisition Provisions	27
Control Share Cash-Out Provisions	27
Disgorgement Provisions	28
Fair Price Provisions	28
Freeze-Out Provisions	28
Greenmail	28
Shareholder Litigation Rights	28
Federal Forum Selection Provisions	28
Exclusive Forum Provisions for State Law Matters	29
Fee Shifting	29
Net Operating Loss (NOL) Protective Amendments	29
Poison Pills (Shareholder Rights Plans)	30
Shareholder Proposals to Put Pill to a Vote and/or Adopt a Pill Policy	30
Management Proposals to Ratify a Poison Pill	30
Management Proposals to Ratify a Pill to Preserve Net Operating Losses (NOLs)	31
Proxy Voting Disclosure, Confidentiality, and Tabulation	31
Ratification Proposals: Management Proposals to Ratify Existing Charter or Bylaw Provisions	31
Reimbursing Proxy Solicitation Expenses	32
Reincorporation Proposals	32
Shareholder Ability to Act by Written Consent	32
Shareholder Ability to Call Special Meetings	33
Stakeholder Provisions	33
State Antitakeover Statutes	33
Supermajority Vote Requirements	33
Virtual Shareholder Meetings	34
4. Capital/Restructuring	35
Capital	35
Adjustments to Par Value of Common Stock	35
Common Stock Authorization	35
General Authorization Requests	35
Specific Authorization Requests	36
Dual Class Structure	36
Issue Stock for Use with Rights Plan	36
Preemptive Rights	36

Preferred Stock Authorization	37
General Authorization Requests	37
Specific Authorization Requests	38
Recapitalization Plans	38
Reverse Stock Splits	38
Share Repurchase Programs	38
Stock Distributions: Splits and Dividends	39
Tracking Stock	39
Share Issuance Mandates at U.S. Domestic Issuers Incorporated Outside the U.S.	39
Restructuring	39
Appraisal Rights	39
Asset Purchases	40
Asset Sales	40
Bundled Proposals	40
Conversion of Securities	40
Corporate Reorganization/Debt Restructuring/Prepackaged Bankruptcy Plans/Reverse Leveraged Buyouts/Wrap Plans	40
Formation of Holding Company	41
Going Private and Going Dark Transactions (LBOs and Minority Squeeze-outs)	41
Joint Ventures	42
Liquidations	42
Mergers and Acquisitions	42
Private Placements/Warrants/Convertible Debentures	43
Reorganization/Restructuring Plan (Bankruptcy)	44
Special Purpose Acquisition Corporations (SPACs)	44
Special Purpose Acquisition Corporations (SPACs) — Proposals for Extensions	45
Spin-offs	45
Value Maximization Shareholder Proposals	45
5. Compensation	46
Executive Pay Evaluation	46
Advisory Votes on Executive Compensation — Management Proposals (Management Say-on-Pay)	46
Pay-for-Performance Evaluation	47
Problematic Pay Practices	48
Compensation Committee Communications and Responsiveness	49
Frequency of Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation (“Say When on Pay”)	49
Voting on Golden Parachutes in an Acquisition, Merger, Consolidation, or Proposed Sale	49
Equity-Based and Other Incentive Plans	50
Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT)	51
Three-Year Value-Adjusted Burn Rate	51
Egregious Factors	51
Liberal Change in Control Definition	51
Repricing Provisions	52
Problematic Pay Practices or Significant Pay-for-Performance Disconnect	52

Specific Treatment of Certain Award Types in Equity Plan Evaluations	52
Dividend Equivalent Rights	52
Operating Partnership (OP) Units in Equity Plan Analysis of Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)	53
Other Compensation Plans.....	53
401(k) Employee Benefit Plans.....	53
Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs)	53
Employee Stock Purchase Plans — Qualified Plans	53
Employee Stock Purchase Plans — Non-Qualified Plans	53
Amending Cash and Equity Plans (including Approval for Tax Deductibility (162(m))).....	54
Option Exchange Programs/Repricing Options	54
Stock Plans in Lieu of Cash	55
Transfer Stock Option (TSO) Programs	55
Director Compensation	56
Shareholder Ratification of Director Pay Programs	56
Equity Plans for Non-Employee Directors.....	56
Non-Employee Director Retirement Plans.....	57
Shareholder Proposals on Compensation	57
Adopt Anti-Hedging/Pledging/Speculative Investments Policy.....	57
Bonus Banking/Bonus Banking “Plus”	57
Compensation Consultants — Disclosure of Board or Company’s Utilization	57
Disclosure/Setting Levels or Types of Compensation for Executives and Directors	57
Golden Coffins/Executive Death Benefits.....	58
Hold Equity Past Retirement or for a Significant Period of Time	58
Pay Disparity.....	58
Pay for Performance/Performance-Based Awards	58
Pay for Superior Performance	59
Pre-Arranged Trading Plans (10b5-1 Plans)	59
Prohibit Outside CEOs from Serving on Compensation Committees	60
Recoupment of Incentive or Stock Compensation in Specified Circumstances.....	60
Severance Agreements for Executives/Golden Parachutes	60
Share Buyback Proposals.....	61
Supplemental Executive Retirement Plans (SERPs)	61
Tax Gross-Up Proposals	61
Termination of Employment Prior to Severance Payment/Eliminating Accelerated Vesting of Unvested Equity.....	61
6. Social and Environmental Issues	62
Global Approach.....	62
Animal Welfare	62
Animal Welfare Policies	62
Animal Testing	63
Animal Slaughter	63

Consumer Issues.....	63
Genetically Modified Ingredients	63
Reports on Potentially Controversial Business/Financial Practices	64
Consumer Lending.....	64
Pharmaceutical Pricing, Access to Medicines, Product Reimportation and Health Pandemics	64
Health Pandemics.....	65
Product Safety and Toxic/Hazardous Materials	65
Tobacco-Related Proposals.....	65
Climate Change	66
Climate Change/Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions	66
Say on Climate (SoC) Management Proposals.....	66
Say on Climate (SoC) Shareholder Proposals.....	67
Energy Efficiency.....	67
Renewable Energy	67
Diversity.....	67
Board Diversity	67
Equality of Opportunity	68
Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation, and Domestic Partner Benefits	68
Gender, Race/Ethnicity Pay Gap	68
Racial Equity and/or Civil Rights Audits	68
Environment and Sustainability.....	68
Facility and Workplace Safety.....	68
Hydraulic Fracturing	69
Operations in Protected Areas	69
Recycling.....	69
Sustainability Reporting.....	69
Water Issues	70
Equator Principles.....	70
General Corporate Issues	70
Charitable Contributions	70
Data Security, Privacy, and Internet Issues	71
Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Compensation-Related Proposals	71
Human Rights, Labor Issues, and International Operations	71
Human Rights Proposals.....	72
Mandatory Arbitration	72
MacBride Principles.....	72
Community Social and Environmental Impact Assessments	73
Operations in High-Risk Markets	73
Outsourcing/Offshoring	73
Sexual Harassment	74
Weapons and Military Sales	74

Political Activities	74
Lobbying.....	74
Political Contributions	74
Political Ties.....	75
Political Expenditures and Lobbying Congruency.....	75
7. Mutual Fund Proxies	76
Election of Directors	76
Closed End Funds — Unilateral Opt-In to Control Share Acquisition Statutes	76
Converting Closed-end Fund to Open-end Fund	76
Proxy Contests	76
Investment Advisory Agreements	76
Approving New Classes or Series of Shares.....	77
Preferred Stock Proposals	77
1940 Act Policies.....	77
Changing a Fundamental Restriction to a Nonfundamental Restriction	77
Change Fundamental Investment Objective to Nonfundamental	77
Name Change Proposals.....	77
Change in Fund's Subclassification	78
Business Development Companies — Authorization to Sell Shares of Common Stock at a Price below Net Asset Value	78
Disposition of Assets/Termination/Liquidation	78
Changes to the Charter Document.....	78
Changing the Domicile of a Fund.....	79
Authorizing the Board to Hire and Terminate Subadvisers Without Shareholder Approval	79
Distribution Agreements	79
Master-Feeder Structure	79
Mergers	79
Shareholder Proposals for Mutual Funds	80
Establish Director Ownership Requirement	80
Reimburse Shareholder for Expenses Incurred	80
Terminate the Investment Advisor	80
8 Foreign Private Issuers Listed on U.S. Exchanges	81

Introduction

ISS recognizes the growing view among investment professionals that sustainability or environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) factors could present material risks to portfolio investments. Whereas investment managers have traditionally analyzed topics such as board accountability and executive compensation to mitigate risk, greater numbers are incorporating ESG performance into their investment making decisions in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the overall risk profile of the companies in which they invest and ensure sustainable long-term profitability for their beneficiaries.

Investors concerned with portfolio value preservation and enhancement through the incorporation of sustainability factors can also carry out this active ownership approach through their proxy voting activity. In voting their shares, sustainability-minded investors are concerned not only with economic returns to shareholders and good corporate governance, but also with ensuring corporate activities and practices are aligned with the broader objectives of society. These investors seek standardized reporting on ESG issues, request information regarding an issuer's adoption of, or adherence to, relevant norms, standards, codes of conduct or universally recognized international initiatives including affirmative support for related shareholder resolutions advocating enhanced disclosure and transparency.

ISS' Sustainability Proxy Voting Guidelines

ISS has, therefore, developed proxy voting guidelines that are consistent with the objectives of sustainability-minded investors and fiduciaries. On matters of ESG import, ISS' Sustainability Policy seeks to promote support for recognized global governing bodies promoting sustainable business practices advocating for stewardship of environment, fair labor practices, non-discrimination, and the protection of human rights. Generally, ISS' Sustainability Policy will take as its frame of reference internationally recognized sustainability-related initiatives such as the United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP FI), United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment (UNPRI), United Nations Global Compact, Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), Carbon Principles, International Labour Organization Conventions (ILO), Ceres Roadmap 2030, Global Sullivan Principles, MacBride Principles, and environmental and social European Union Directives. Each of these efforts promote a fair, unified and productive reporting and compliance environment which advances positive corporate ESG actions that promote practices that present new opportunities or that mitigate related financial and reputational risks.

On matters of corporate governance, executive compensation, and corporate structure, the Sustainability Policy guidelines are based on a commitment to create and preserve economic value and to advance principles of good corporate governance.

These guidelines provide an overview of how ISS approaches proxy voting issues for subscribers of the Sustainability Policy. We note there may be cases in which the final vote recommendation at a particular company varies from the voting guidelines due to the fact that we closely examine the merits of each proposal and consider relevant information and company-specific circumstances in arriving at our decisions. To that end, ISS engages with both interested shareholders as well as issuers to gain further insight into contentious issues facing the company. Where ISS acts as voting agent for clients, it follows each client's voting policy, which may differ in some cases from the policies outlined in this document. ISS updates its guidelines on an annual basis to take into account emerging issues and trends on environmental, social and corporate governance topics, as well as the evolution of market standards, regulatory changes and client feedback.

1. Routine/Miscellaneous

Adjourn Meeting

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to reduce quorum requirements for shareholder meetings below a majority of the shares outstanding, taking into consideration:

- The new quorum threshold requested;
- The rationale presented for the reduction;
- The market capitalization of the company (size, inclusion in indices);
- The company’s ownership structure;
- Previous voter turnout or attempts to achieve quorum;
- Any provisions or commitments to restore quorum to a majority of shares outstanding, should voter turnout improve sufficiently; and
- Other factors as appropriate.

In general, a quorum threshold kept as close to a majority of shares outstanding as is achievable is preferred.

Vote case-by-case on directors who unilaterally lower the quorum requirements below a majority of the shares outstanding, taking into consideration the factors listed above.

Amend Minor Bylaws

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for bylaw or charter changes that are of a housekeeping nature (updates or corrections).

Change Company Name

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against proposals to approve other business when it appears as voting item.

Audit-Related

Auditor Indemnification and Limitation of Liability

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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; misapplication of GAAP; and material weaknesses identified in Section 404 disclosures; 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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.

2. Board of Directors

Voting on Director Nominees in Uncontested Elections

Four fundamental principles apply when determining votes on director nominees:

- **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.
- **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.
- **Composition**: Companies should seek directors who can add value to the board through specific skills or expertise and who can devote 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.
- **Independence**: Boards should be sufficiently independent from management (and significant shareholders) so as 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.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for director nominees, except under the following circumstances (with new nominees¹ considered on a case-by-case basis):

Accountability

Problematic Takeover Defenses, Capital Structure, and Governance Structures

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.

¹ 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.

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 with no plurality carve-out for 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.

Poison Pills: Generally vote against or withhold from all nominees (except new nominees¹, who should be considered case-by-case) if:

- The company has a poison pill with a deadhand or slowhand feature²;
- 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 company has a long-term poison pill (with a term of over one year) that was not approved by the public shareholders³.

Vote case-by-case on nominees if the board adopts an initial short-term pill³ (with a term of one year or less) without shareholder approval, taking into consideration:

- The disclosed rationale for the adoption;
- The trigger;
- The company's market capitalization (including absolute level and sudden changes);
- A commitment to put any renewal to a shareholder vote; and
- Other factors as relevant.

Unilateral Bylaw/Charter Amendments: Generally vote against or withhold from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees², 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;
- 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;

² If the short-term pill with a deadhand or slowhand feature is enacted but expires before the next shareholder vote, Sustainability Advisory Services will generally still recommend withhold/against nominees at the next shareholder meeting following its adoption.

³ Approval prior to, or in connection with, a company's becoming publicly-traded, or in connection with a de-SPAC transaction, is insufficient.

- 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, who should be considered case-by-case) if the directors:

- Classified the board;
- Adopted supermajority vote requirements to amend the bylaws or charter;
- Eliminated shareholders' ability to amend bylaws;
- Adopted a fee-shifting provision; or
- Adopted another provision deemed egregious.

Problematic Governance Structure: For companies that hold or held their first annual meeting⁷ of public shareholders after Feb. 1, 2015, generally vote against or withhold from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees¹, 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 provision which specifies that the problematic structure(s) will be sunset within seven years of the date of going public will be considered a mitigating factor.

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

Unequal Voting Rights: Generally vote withhold or against directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees¹, who should be considered case-by-case), if the company employs a common stock structure with unequal voting rights⁵.

Exceptions to this policy will generally be limited to:

- Newly-public companies⁶ 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.

⁴ Includes companies that emerge from bankruptcy, SPAC transactions, spin-offs, direct listings, and those who complete a traditional initial public offering.

⁵ 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").

⁶ 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.

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.

Restricting Binding Shareholder Proposals: Generally vote against or withhold from 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 requirement 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 (see discussion under "Auditor Ratification");
- 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 a significant 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;
- 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.

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) 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 oversight⁷, or fiduciary responsibilities at the company, including failure to adequately guard against or manage ESG risks;
- A lack of sustainability reporting in the company's public documents and/or website in conjunction with a failure to adequately manage or mitigate ESG risks;
- 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.

Climate Risk Mitigation and Net Zero

For companies that are significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters, through their operations or value chain⁸, 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 Sustainability Advisory Services determines that the company is not taking the minimum steps need to be aligned with a Net Zero by 2050 trajectory.

⁷ Examples of failure of risk oversight include, but are not limited to: bribery; large or serial fines or sanctions from regulatory bodies; demonstrably poor risk oversight of environmental and social issues, including climate change; significant environmental incidents including spills and pollution; large scale or repeat workplace fatalities or injuries; significant adverse legal judgments or settlements; or hedging of company stock.

⁸ For 2024, companies defined as "significant GHG emitters" will be those on the current Climate Action 100+ Focus Group list.

For **2024**, the minimum steps needed to be considered to be aligned with a Net Zero by 2050 trajectory are (all minimum criteria will be required to be in alignment with the policy):

- The company has 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.
- The company has declared a Net Zero target by 2050 or sooner and the target includes scope 1, 2, and relevant scope 3 emissions.
- The company has set a medium-term target for reducing its GHG emissions.

Expectations about what constitutes “minimum steps needed to be aligned with a Net Zero by 2050 trajectory” will increase over time.

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 regarding the issues that contributed to the low level of support (including the timing and frequency of engagements and 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.
- The board implements an advisory vote on executive compensation on a less frequent basis than the frequency that received the plurality of votes cast.

Composition

Attendance at Board and Committee Meetings: Generally vote against or withhold from directors (except nominees who served only part of the fiscal year⁹) 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 boards¹⁰.

Gender Diversity

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against or withhold from the chair of the nominating committee, or other nominees on a case-by-case basis, if the board lacks at least one director of an underrepresented gender identity¹¹.

Racial and/or Ethnic Diversity

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: 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 members¹².

⁹ Nominees who served for only part of the fiscal year are generally exempted from the attendance policy.

¹⁰ Although all of a CEO's subsidiary boards will be counted as separate boards, Sustainability Advisory Services 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.

¹¹ Underrepresented gender identity includes directors who identify as women or as non-binary.

¹² Aggregate diversity statistics provided by the board will only be considered if specific to racial and/or ethnic diversity.

Independence

Vote against or withhold from non-independent directors (Executive Directors and Non-Independent Non-Executive Directors per Sustainability Advisory Services' 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.

Sustainability Policy Classification of Directors — U.S.

1. Executive Director

1.1. Current officer^[1] of the company or one of its affiliates^[2].

2. Non-Independent Non-Executive Director

Board Identification

2.1. Director identified as not independent by the board.

Controlling/Significant Shareholder

2.2. 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 Partnership

2.3. Non-officer employee of the firm (including employee representatives).

2.4. Officer^[1], former officer, or general or limited partner of a joint venture or partnership with the company.

Former Employment

2.5. Former CEO of the company.^{[3],[4]}

2.6. Former non-CEO officer^[1] of the company or an affiliate^[2] within the past five years.

2.7. Former officer^[1] of an acquired company within the past five years^[4].

2.8. Officer^[1] of a former parent or predecessor firm at the time the company was sold or split off within the past five years.

2.9. 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.^[5]

Family Members

2.10. Immediate family member^[6] of a current or former officer^[1] of the company or its affiliates^[2] within the last five years.

2.11. Immediate family member^[6] of a current employee of company or its affiliates^[2] 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

2.12. Director who (or whose immediate family member^[6]) currently provides professional services^[7] in excess of \$10,000 per year to: the company, an affiliate^[2], or an individual officer of the company or an affiliate; either directly or is (or whose family member is) a partner, employee, or controlling shareholder of an organization which provides the services.

2.13. Director who (or whose immediate family member^[6]) currently has any material transactional relationship^[8] with the company or its affiliates^[2]; or who is (or whose immediately family member^[6] is) a partner in, or a controlling shareholder or an executive officer of, an organization which has the material transactional relationship^[8] (excluding investments in the company through a private placement).

2.14. Director who (or whose immediate family member^[6]) is a trustee, director, or employee of a charitable or non-profit organization that receives material grants or endowments^[8] from the company or its affiliates^[2].

Other Relationships

2.15. Party to a voting agreement^[9] to vote in line with management on proposals being brought to shareholder vote.

2.16. Has (or an immediate family member^[6] has) an interlocking relationship as defined by the SEC involving members of the board of directors or its Compensation Committee^[10].

2.17. Founder^[11] of the company but not currently an employee.

2.18. Director with pay comparable to Named Executive Officers.

2.19. Any material^[12] relationship with the company.

3. Independent Director

3.1. No material^[12] connection to the company other than a board seat.

Footnotes:

^[1] 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 be classified as an Affiliated Outsider under “Any material relationship with the company.” However, if the company provides explicit disclosure that the director is not receiving additional compensation in excess of \$10,000 per year for serving in that capacity, then the director will be classified as an Independent Outsider.

^[2] “Affiliate” includes a subsidiary, sibling company, or parent company. Sustainability Advisory Services 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.

^[3] Includes any former CEO of the company prior to the company’s initial public offering (IPO).

^[4] When there is a former CEO of a special purpose acquisition company (SPAC) serving on the board of an acquired company, Sustainability Advisory Services 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.

^[5] Sustainability Advisory Services 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. Sustainability Advisory Services will also consider if a formal search process was under way for a full-time officer at the time.

^[6] “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.

^[7] 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.

^[8] 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, in the case of a company which follows NASDAQ listing standards; or the greater of \$1,000,000 or 2 percent of the recipient’s gross revenues, in the case of a company which follows NYSE listing standards. In the case of a company which follows neither of the preceding standards, Sustainability Advisory Services will apply the NASDAQ-based materiality test. (The recipient is the party receiving the financial proceeds from the transaction).

^[9] Dissident directors who are parties to a voting agreement pursuant to a settlement or similar arrangement may be classified as independent outsiders 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.

^[10] 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, Sustainability Advisory Services may deem him or her an independent outsider.

^[12] For purposes of Sustainability Advisory Services’ 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.

Other Board — Related Proposals

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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against management proposals to eliminate cumulative voting, and for shareholder proposals to restore or provide for cumulative voting, unless:

- The company has proxy access, 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, Liability Protection, and Exculpation

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals on director and officer indemnification liability protection, and exculpation¹³.

Consider the stated rationale for the proposed change. Also consider, among other factors, the extent to which the proposal would:

- Eliminate entirely directors' and officers' liability for monetary damages for violating the duty of care.
- Eliminate directors' and officers' liability for monetary damages for violating the duty of loyalty.
- 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 individual was found to have acted in good faith and in a manner that the individual 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

Sustainability Policy 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:

- 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.

¹³ **Indemnification:** the condition of being secured against loss or damage.

Limited liability: a person's financial liability is limited to a fixed sum, or personal financial assets are not at risk if the individual loses a lawsuit that results in financial award/damages to the plaintiff.

Exculpation: to eliminate or limit the personal liability of a director or officer to the corporation or its shareholders for monetary damages for breach of fiduciary duty as a director or officer.

Establish Other Board Committee Proposals

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

One of the principal functions of the board is to monitor and evaluate the performance of the CEO and other executive officers. The board chair's duty to oversee management may be compromised when he/she is connected to or a part of the management team. Generally, Sustainability Advisory Services recommends supporting shareholder proposals that would require that the position of board chair be held by an individual with no materials ties to the company other than their board seat.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally, support shareholder proposals that would require the board chair to be independent of management.

Majority of Independent Directors/Establishment of Independent Committees

Sustainability Policy 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 the Sustainability policy's definition of independent outsider. (See Sustainability Policy Classification of Directors — U.S.)

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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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)

Sustainability Policy 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 Sustainability Advisory Services' policy definition. This individual must be made available for periodic consultation and direct communication with major shareholders.

Proxy Contests/Proxy Access — Voting for Director Nominees in Contested Elections

Sustainability Policy 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
- 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 or not there are more candidates than board seats).

Vote-No Campaigns

Sustainability Policy 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.

3. Shareholder Rights & Defenses

Advance Notice Requirements for Shareholder Proposals/Nominations

Sustainability Policy 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 proposal/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

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against proposals giving the board exclusive authority to amend the bylaws.

Vote for proposals giving the board the ability to amend the bylaws in addition to shareholders.

Control Share Acquisition Provisions

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.

Sustainability Policy 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 Cash-Out Provisions

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.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals to opt out of control share cash-out statutes.

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.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals to opt out of state disgorgement provisions.

Fair Price Provisions

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

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.

Sustainability Policy 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.

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.

Sustainability Policy 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).

Sustainability Policy 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.

Sustainability Policy 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 and Problematic Capital Structures policy.

Net Operating Loss (NOL) Protective Amendments

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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% trigger, flip-in or flip-over;
- A term of no more than three years;
- No dead-hand, slow-hand, 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)

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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% 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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 unfettered¹⁴ 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

Sustainability Policy 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% preferred);
- The inclusion of exclusionary or prohibitive language;
- Investor ownership structure; and
- Shareholder support of, and management's response to, previous shareholder proposals.

Stakeholder Provisions

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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.

¹⁴ "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.

Virtual Shareholder Meetings

Sustainability Policy 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-only¹⁵ 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.

¹⁵ 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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;¹⁶
- 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're 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.

¹⁶ 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.

Specific Authorization Requests

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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;
- Conflicts of interest; and
- Other alternatives considered.

Reverse Stock Splits

Sustainability Policy 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 Sustainability Advisory Services' 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

Sustainability Policy 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.

Stock Distributions: Splits and Dividends

Sustainability Policy 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 Sustainability Advisory Services' Common Stock Authorization policy.

Tracking Stock

Sustainability Policy 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.

Share Issuance Mandates at U.S. Domestic Issuers Incorporated Outside the U.S.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: For U.S. domestic issuers incorporated outside the U.S. and listed solely on a U.S. exchange, generally vote for resolutions to authorize the issuance of common shares up to 20 percent of currently issued common share capital, where not tied to a specific transaction or financing proposal.

For pre-revenue or other early-stage companies that are heavily reliant on periodic equity financing, generally vote for resolutions to authorize the issuance of common shares up to 50 percent of currently issued common share capital. The burden of proof will be on the company to establish that it has a need for the higher limit.

Renewal of such mandates should be sought at each year's annual meeting.

Vote case-by-case on share issuances for a specific transaction or financing proposal.

Restructuring

Appraisal Rights

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals to restore or provide shareholders with rights of appraisal.

Asset Purchases

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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)

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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.
- 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

Sustainability Policy 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)

Sustainability Policy 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)

Sustainability Policy 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% rule (the charter requires that the fair market value of the target is at least equal to 80% 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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 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 (Management Say-on-Pay)

Sustainability Policy 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 is 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**

Sustainability Advisory Services 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 Russell 3000 or Russell 3000E Indices¹⁷, this analysis considers the following:

1. Peer Group¹⁸ 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 Alignment¹⁹ — 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, misaligned pay and performance are otherwise suggested, our analysis may include any of the following qualitative factors, as relevant to evaluating 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;
- 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 pay²⁰ compared to grant pay; and
- Any other factors deemed relevant.

¹⁷ The Russell 3000E Index includes approximately 4,000 of the largest U.S. equity securities.

¹⁸ 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. For Oil, Gas & Consumable Fuels companies, market cap is the only size determinant.

¹⁹ Only Russell 3000 Index companies are subject to the Absolute Alignment analysis.

²⁰ Sustainability Advisory Services research reports include realizable pay for S&P1500 companies.

Problematic Pay Practices

Problematic pay elements are generally evaluated case-by-case considering the context of a company's overall pay program and demonstrated pay-for-performance philosophy. The focus is on executive compensation practices that contravene the global pay principles, including:

- Problematic practices related to non-performance-based compensation elements;
- 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.

The list of examples below highlights certain 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;
- Severance payments made when the termination is not clearly disclosed as involuntary (for example, a termination without cause or resignation for good reason);
- 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.

The above examples are not an exhaustive list. Please refer to ISS' U.S. Compensation Policies FAQ document for additional detail on specific pay practices that have been identified as problematic and may lead to negative vote recommendations.

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:
 - The company's response, including:
 - Disclosure of engagement efforts with major institutional investors regarding the issues that contributed to the low level of support (including the timing and frequency of engagements and 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")

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on say on Golden Parachute proposals, including consideration of existing change-in-control arrangements maintained with named executive officers rather than focusing primarily on 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 (>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), the say-on-pay proposal will be evaluated 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 Sustainability Advisory Services' U.S. Equity Compensation Plans FAQ document for additional details on the Equity Plan Scorecard policy.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on certain equity-based compensation plans²¹ 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;

²¹ Proposals evaluated under the EPSC policy generally include those to approve or amend (1) stock option plans for employees 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.

- 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 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 subject to 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.²²

Three-Year Value-Adjusted Burn Rate

A "Value-Adjusted Burn Rate" is used for stock plan evaluations. Value-Adjusted Burn Rate benchmarks are 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).

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.

²² For plans evaluated under the Equity Plan Scorecard policy, the company's SVT benchmark is considered along with other factors.

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” 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, Sustainability Advisory Services 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 Sustainability Advisory Services) 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.

If a significant portion of the CEO’s misaligned pay is attributed to non-performance-based equity awards, and there is an equity plan on the ballot with the CEO as one of the participants, Sustainability Advisory Services may recommend a vote against the equity plan. Considerations in voting against the equity plan may include, but are not limited to:

- Magnitude of pay misalignment;
- Contribution of non-performance-based equity grants to overall pay; and
- The proportion of equity awards granted in the last three fiscal years concentrated at the named executive officer level.

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

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals to implement a 401(k) savings plan for employees.

Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs)

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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 any of the following apply:

- Purchase price is less than 85 percent of fair market value; or
- Offering period is greater than 27 months; or
- The number of shares allocated to the plan is more than ten percent of the outstanding shares.

Employee Stock Purchase Plans — Non-Qualified Plans

Sustainability Policy 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 (*i.e.*, all employees of the company with the exclusion of individuals with 5 percent or more of beneficial ownership of the company);
- 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;
- 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 any of the plan features do not meet the above criteria. If the company matching contribution or effective discount exceeds the above, Sustainability Advisory Services may evaluate the SVT cost as part of the assessment.

Amending Cash and Equity Plans (including Approval for Tax Deductibility (162(m)))

Sustainability Policy 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 outsiders, per Sustainability Advisory Services' Classification of Directors. Note that if the company is presenting the plan to shareholders for the first time after the company's initial public offering (IPO), or if the proposal is bundled with other material plan amendments, then the recommendation will be case-by-case (see below).

Vote against such 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 outsiders, per Sustainability Advisory Services' 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 may potentially increase the transfer of shareholder value to employees, 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 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 are not deemed to potentially increase the transfer of shareholder value to employees, then the recommendation will be based entirely on an analysis of the overall impact of the amendments, and the EPSC evaluation will be shown for informational purposes.

Option Exchange Programs/Repricing Options

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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, no adjustments will be made to carve out the in-lieu-of cash compensation.

Transfer Stock Option (TSO) Programs

Sustainability Policy 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;
- 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
- 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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; and
- The presence of any egregious plan features (such as an option repricing provision or liberal CIC vesting risk).

On occasion, 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Adopt Anti-Hedging/Pledging/Speculative Investments Policy

Sustainability Policy 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.

Bonus Banking/Bonus Banking "Plus"

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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.

Vote against shareholder proposals seeking to set absolute levels on compensation or otherwise dictate the amount or form of compensation.

Vote against shareholder proposals seeking to eliminate stock options or any other equity grants to employees or directors.

Vote against shareholder proposals requiring director fees be paid in stock only.

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 company performance, pay level versus peers, pay level versus industry, and long-term corporate outlook.

Golden Coffins/Executive Death Benefits

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals calling 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 that the broad-based employee population is eligible.

Hold Equity Past Retirement or for a Significant Period of Time

Sustainability Policy 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

Pay Disparity

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote case-by-case on proposals calling for an analysis of the pay disparity between corporate executives and other non-executive employees.

Pay for Performance/Performance-Based Awards

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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)

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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, the following factors will be taken into consideration:

- 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

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals requiring that executive severance (including change-in-control related) arrangements or payments be submitted for shareholder ratification.

Factors that will be considered include, but are not limited to:

- The company's severance or change-in-control agreements in place, and the presence of problematic features (such as excessive severance entitlements, single triggers, excise tax gross-ups, etc.);
- Any existing limits on cash severance payouts or policies which require shareholder ratification of severance payments exceeding a certain level;
- Any recent severance-related controversies; and
- Whether the proposal is overly prescriptive, such as requiring shareholder approval of severance that does not exceed market norms.

Share Buyback Proposals

Sustainability Policy 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.

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)

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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 in change-of-control situations (i.e. is it double triggered, 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 acceleration of the vesting of equity awards to senior executives 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. Social and Environmental Issues

Global Approach

Socially responsible shareholder resolutions receive a great deal more attention from institutional shareholders today than in the past. While focusing on value enhancement through risk mitigation and exposure to new sustainability-related opportunities, these resolutions also seek standardized reporting on ESG issues, request information regarding an issuer's adoption of, or adherence to, relevant norms, standards, codes of conduct or universally recognized international initiatives to promote disclosure and transparency. Sustainability Advisory Services generally supports standards-based ESG shareholder proposals that enhance long-term shareholder and stakeholder value while aligning the interests of the company with those of society at large. In particular, the policy will focus on resolutions seeking greater transparency and/or adherence to internationally recognized standards and principles.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: In determining our vote recommendation on standardized ESG reporting shareholder proposals, we also analyze the following factors:

- Whether the proposal itself is well framed and reasonable;
- Whether adoption of the proposal would have either a positive or negative impact on the company's short-term or long-term share value;
- The percentage of sales, assets and earnings affected;
- Whether the company has already responded in some appropriate manner to the request embodied in a proposal;
- Whether the company's analysis and voting recommendation to shareholders is persuasive;
- Whether there are significant controversies, fines, penalties, or litigation associated with the company's environmental or social practices;
- What other companies have done in response to the issue addressed in the proposal;
- Whether implementation of the proposal would achieve the objectives sought in the proposal; and
- The degree to which the company's stated position on the issues raised in the proposal could affect its reputation or sales, or leave it vulnerable to a boycott or selective purchasing.

Animal Welfare

Animal Welfare Policies

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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 FOR proposals seeking a report on the social, health, and environmental effects of genetically modified organism (GMOs).

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

Sustainability Policy 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.

Consumer Lending

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for reports on the company's lending guidelines and procedures taking into account:

- Whether the company has adequately disclosed mechanisms in place to prevent abusive lending practices;
- Whether the company has adequately disclosed the financial risks of the lending products in question;
- Whether the company has been subject to violations of lending laws or serious lending controversies; and
- Peer companies' policies to prevent abusive lending practices.

Pharmaceutical Pricing, Access to Medicines, Product Reimportation and Health Pandemics

Sustainability Policy 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; and
- 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.

Health Pandemics

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for reports outlining the impact of health pandemics (such as COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and avian flu) on the company's operations and how the company is responding to the situation, taking into account:

- The scope of the company's operations in the affected/relevant area(s);
- The company's existing healthcare policies, including benefits and healthcare access; and
- Company donations to relevant healthcare providers.

Vote against proposals asking companies to establish, implement, and report on a standard of response to health pandemics (such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and avian flu), unless the company has significant operations in the affected markets and has failed to adopt policies and/or procedures to address these issues comparable to those of industry peers.

Product Safety and Toxic/Hazardous Materials

Sustainability Policy 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.

Generally vote for 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.

Generally vote against resolutions requiring that a company reformulate its products.

Tobacco-Related Proposals

Sustainability Policy 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

Climate Change/Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions

Climate change has emerged as the most significant environmental threat to the planet to date. Scientists agree that gases released by chemical reactions including the burning of fossil fuels contribute to a “greenhouse effect” that traps the planet’s heat. Environmentalists claim that the greenhouse gases produced by the industrial age have caused recent weather crises such as heat waves, rainstorms, melting glaciers, rising sea levels and receding coastlines. With notable exceptions, business leaders have described the rise and fall of global temperatures as naturally occurring phenomena and depicted corporate impact on climate change as minimal. Shareholder proposals asking a company to issue a report to shareholders, “at reasonable cost and omitting proprietary information,” on greenhouse gas emissions ask that the report include descriptions of efforts within companies to reduce emissions, their financial exposure and potential liability from operations that contribute to global warming, their direct or indirect efforts to promote the view that global warming is not a threat and their goals in reducing these emissions from their operations. Proponents argue that there is scientific proof that the burning of fossil fuels causes global warming, that future legislation may make companies financially liable for their contributions to global warming, and that a report on the company’s role in global warming can be assembled at reasonable cost.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking 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 manage such risks.
- Vote for shareholder proposals calling for the reduction of GHG emissions.
- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking reports on responses to regulatory and public pressures surrounding climate change, and for disclosure of research that aided in setting company policies around climate change.
- Vote for shareholder proposals requesting a report/disclosure of goals on GHG emissions from company operations and/or products.

Say on Climate (SoC) Management Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on management proposals that request shareholders to approve the company’s climate transition action plan²³, 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;

²³ Variations of this request also include climate transition related ambitions, or commitment to reporting on the implementation of a climate plan.

- 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

Sustainability Policy 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:

- 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.

Energy Efficiency

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals requesting that a company report on its energy efficiency policies.

Renewable Energy

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for requests for reports on the feasibility of developing renewable energy resources.

Generally vote for proposals requesting that the company invest in renewable energy resources.

Diversity

Board Diversity

Sustainability Policy 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.

Generally vote for shareholder proposals that ask the company to take reasonable steps to increase the levels of underrepresented gender identities and racial minorities on the board.

Equality of Opportunity

Sustainability Policy 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.

Generally vote for proposals seeking information on the diversity efforts of suppliers and service providers.

Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation, and Domestic Partner Benefits

Sustainability Policy 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 for proposals to extend company benefits to domestic partners.

Gender, Race/Ethnicity Pay Gap

Sustainability Policy 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 and 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 Audits

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals requesting that a company conduct an independent racial equity and/or civil rights audit, considering company disclosures, policies, actions, and engagements.

Environment and Sustainability

Facility and Workplace Safety

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: 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.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Sustainability Policy 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.

Operations in Protected Areas

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote FOR proposals to adopt a comprehensive recycling strategy, 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

Shareholders may request general environmental disclosures or reports on a specific location/operation, often requesting that the company detail the environmental risks and potential liabilities of a specific project. Increasingly, companies have begun reporting on environmental and sustainability issues using the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards. The GRI was established in 1997 with the mission of developing globally applicable guidelines for reporting on economic, environmental, and social performance. The GRI was developed by Ceres (formerly known as the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies, CERES) in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Ceres was formed in the wake of the March 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, when a consortium of investors, environmental groups, and religious organizations drafted what were originally named the Valdez Principles. Later to be renamed the CERES Principles, and now branded as the Ceres Roadmap to 2030, corporate signatories to the Ceres Roadmap to 2030 pledge to publicly report on environmental issues, including protection of the biosphere, sustainable use of natural resources, reduction and disposal of wastes, energy conservation, and employee and community risk reduction in a standardized form.

The Equator Principles are the financial industry's benchmark for determining, assessing and managing social and environmental risk in project financing. The Principles were first launched in June 2003 and were ultimately adopted by over forty financial institutions during a three year implementation period. The principles were subsequently revised in July 2006 to take into account the new performance standards approved by the World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation (IFC). The third iteration of the Principles was launched in June 2013 and it amplified the banks' commitments to social responsibility, including human rights, climate change, and transparency. Financial institutions adopt these principles to ensure that the projects they venture in are developed in a socially responsible manner and reflect sound environmental management practices.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking greater disclosure on the company's environmental and social practices, and/or associated risks and liabilities.
- Vote for shareholder proposals asking companies to report in accordance with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).
- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking the preparation of sustainability reports.
- Vote for shareholder proposals to study or implement the CERES Roadmap 2030.
- Vote for shareholder proposals to study or implement the Equator Principles.

Water Issues

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for on proposals requesting a company to report on, or to 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.

Equator Principles

The Equator Principles are the financial industry's benchmark for determining, assessing and managing social and environmental risk in project financing. First launched in June 2003, the Principles were ultimately adopted by over forty financial institutions over a three-year implementation period. Since its adoption, the Principles have undergone a number of revisions, expanding the use of performance standards and signatory banks' banks' commitments to social responsibility, including human rights, climate change, and transparency. The fourth iteration of the Principles was launched in November 2019, incorporating amendments and new commitment to human rights, climate change, Indigenous Peoples and biodiversity related topics. Financial institutions adopt these principles to ensure that the projects they finance are developed in a socially responsible manner and reflect sound environmental management practices. As of 2019, 101 financial institutions have officially adopted the Equator Principles.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for shareholder proposals to study or implement the Equator Principles.

General Corporate Issues

Charitable Contributions

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals to link, or report on linking, executive compensation to environmental and social criteria (such as corporate downsizings, customer or employee satisfaction, community involvement, human rights, environmental performance, or predatory lending).

Human Rights, Labor Issues, and International Operations

Investors, international human rights groups, and labor advocacy groups have long been making attempts to safeguard worker rights in the international marketplace. In instances where companies themselves operate factories in developing countries for example, these advocates have asked that the companies adopt global corporate human rights standards that guarantee sustainable wages and safe working conditions for their workers abroad. Companies that contract out portions of their manufacturing operations to foreign companies have been asked to ensure that the products they receive from those contractors have not been made using forced labor, child labor, or sweatshop labor. These companies are asked to adopt formal vendor standards that, among other things, include monitoring or auditing mechanisms. Globalization, relocation of production overseas, and widespread use of subcontractors and vendors, often make it difficult to obtain a complete picture of a company's labor practices in global markets. Many Investors believe that companies would benefit from adopting a human rights policy based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Labor Organization's Core Labor Standards. Efforts that seek greater disclosure on a company's labor practices and that seek to establish minimum standards for a company's operations will be supported. In addition, requests for independent monitoring of overseas operations will be supported.

The Sustainability Policy generally supports proposals that call for the adoption and/or enforcement of principles or codes relating to countries in which there are systematic violations of human rights; such as the use of slave, child, or prison labor; a government that is illegitimate; or there is a call by human rights advocates, pro-democracy organizations, or legitimately-elected representatives for economic sanctions. The use of child, sweatshop, or forced labor is unethical and can damage corporate reputations. Poor labor practices can lead to litigation against the company, which can be costly and time consuming.

Human Rights Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation:

- Generally vote for proposals requesting a report on company or company supplier labor and/or human rights standards and policies.
- Vote for shareholder proposals to implement human rights standards and workplace codes of conduct.
- Vote for shareholder proposals calling for the implementation and reporting on ILO codes of conduct, SA 8000 Standards, or the Global Sullivan Principles.
- Vote for shareholder proposals that call for the adoption and/or enforcement of principles or codes relating to countries in which there are systematic violations of human rights.
- Vote for shareholder proposals that call for independent monitoring programs in conjunction with local and respected religious and human rights groups to monitor supplier and licensee compliance with codes.
- Vote for shareholder proposals that seek publication of a “Code of Conduct” to the company’s foreign suppliers and licensees, requiring they satisfy all applicable standards and laws protecting employees’ wages, benefits, working conditions, freedom of association, and other rights.
- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking reports on, or the adoption of, vendor standards including: reporting on incentives to encourage suppliers to raise standards rather than terminate contracts and providing public disclosure of contract supplier reviews on a regular basis.
- Vote for shareholder proposals to adopt labor standards for foreign and domestic suppliers to ensure that the company will not do business with foreign suppliers that manufacture products for sale using forced labor, child labor, or that fail to comply with applicable laws protecting employee’s wages and working conditions.
- Vote for 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.

Mandatory Arbitration

Sustainability Policy 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.

MacBride Principles

These resolutions have called for the adoption of the MacBride Principles for operations located in Northern Ireland. They request companies operating abroad to support the equal employment opportunity policies that apply in facilities they operate domestically. The principles were established to address the sectarian hiring problems between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. It is well documented that Northern Ireland’s Catholic community faced much higher unemployment figures than the Protestant community. In response to this problem, the U.K. government instituted the New Fair Employment Act of 1989 (and subsequent amendments) to address the sectarian hiring problems.

Many companies believe that the Act adequately addresses the problems and that further action, including adoption of the MacBride Principles, only duplicates the efforts already underway. In evaluating a proposal to adopt the MacBride Principles, shareholders must decide whether the principles will cause companies to divest, and therefore worsen the unemployment problem, or whether the principles will promote equal hiring practices.

Proponents believe that the Fair Employment Act does not sufficiently address the sectarian hiring problems. They argue that the MacBride Principles serve to stabilize the situation and promote further investment.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Support the MacBride Principles for operations in Northern Ireland that request companies to abide by equal employment opportunity policies.

Community Social and Environmental Impact Assessments

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for requests for reports outlining 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
- Scope of the resolution.

Operations in High-Risk Markets

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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.

Political Expenditures and Lobbying Congruency

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals requesting greater disclosure of a company's alignment of political contributions, lobbying, and electioneering spending with a company's publicly stated values and policies, unless the terms of the proposal are unduly restrictive. Additionally, Sustainability Advisory Services will consider whether:

- The company's policies, management, board oversight, governance processes, and level of disclosure related to direct political contributions, lobbying activities, and payments to trade associations, political action committees, or other groups that may be used for political purposes;
- The company's disclosure regarding: the reasons for its support of candidates for public offices; the reasons for support of and participation in trade associations or other groups that may make political contributions; and other political activities;
- Any incongruencies identified between a company's direct and indirect political expenditures and its publicly stated values and priorities;
- Recent significant controversies related to the company's direct and indirect lobbying, political contributions, or political activities.

7. Mutual Fund Proxies

Election of Directors

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proxy contests, considering the following factors:

- Past performance relative to its peers;
- Market in which 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for the establishment of new classes or series of shares.

Preferred Stock Proposals

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against proposals to change a fund's fundamental investment objective to non-fundamental.

Name Change Proposals

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for the establishment of a master-feeder structure.

Mergers

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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

Sustainability Policy 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.

8. Foreign Private Issuers Listed on U.S. Exchanges

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against (or withhold from) non-independent director nominees at companies which fail to meet the following criteria: a majority-independent board, and the presence of an audit, a compensation, and a nomination committee, each of which is entirely composed of independent directors.

Where the design and disclosure levels of equity compensation plans are comparable to those seen at U.S. companies, U.S. compensation policy will be used to evaluate the compensation plan proposals. Otherwise, they, and all other voting items, will be evaluated using the relevant regional or market approach under the Sustainability proxy voting guidelines.

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