



# UNITED STATES

## SRI PROXY VOTING GUIDELINES 2025 Policy Recommendations

---

Effective for Meetings on or after February 1, 2025

Published January 9, 2025  
Updated February 25, 2025

*Effective for Shareholder Meeting Reports Published on or after February 25, 2025,  
Consideration of Certain Diversity Factors in Making Vote Recommendations Is Suspended  
(for more information, see pp. 17-18)*

[WWW.ISSGOVERNANCE.COM](http://WWW.ISSGOVERNANCE.COM)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1. Board of Directors .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Uncontested Election of Directors.....	11
Board Accountability .....	11
Problematic Takeover Defenses, Capital Structure, and Governance Structures .....	11
Problematic Audit-Related Practices .....	14
Problematic Compensation Practices .....	14
Problematic Pledging of Company Stock .....	15
Material Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Risk Oversight Failures .....	15
Climate Risk Mitigation and Net Zero .....	15
Board Responsiveness .....	16
Director Independence .....	17
Composition.....	17
Board Diversity .....	17
Classification of Directors – U.S. ....	18
Board-Related Management Proposals.....	20
Classification/Declassification of the Board .....	20
Majority Vote Threshold for Director Elections.....	21
Cumulative Voting .....	21
Director and Officer Indemnification, Liability Protection, and Exculpation .....	21
Shareholder Ability to Remove Directors/Fill Vacancies .....	22
Board Size .....	22
Establish/Amend Nominee Qualifications .....	23
Board Refreshment.....	23
Board-Related Shareholder Proposals/Initiatives .....	23
Proxy Contests/Proxy Access.....	23
Annual Election (Declassification) of the Board .....	24
Majority Threshold Voting Shareholder Proposals.....	24
Majority of Independent Directors.....	24
Establishment of Independent Committees .....	24
Independent Board Chair .....	25
Establishment of Board Committees .....	25
Establish/Amend Nominee Qualifications .....	25
Board Policy on Shareholder Engagement .....	25
Proxy Access .....	26
Board Refreshment.....	26
CEO Succession Planning .....	27
Vote No Campaigns .....	27
<b>2. Ratification of Auditors .....</b>	<b>27</b>
Auditor-Related Shareholder Proposals .....	27
Ratify Auditors/Ensure Auditor Independence .....	27
Auditor Rotation .....	28

<b>3. Takeover Defenses / Shareholder Rights .....</b>	<b>28</b>
Takeover Defenses and Shareholder Rights-Related Management Proposals .....	29
Poison Pills (Shareholder Rights Plans) .....	29
Net Operating Loss (NOL) Poison Pills/Protective Amendments .....	29
Ratification Proposals: Management Proposals to Ratify Existing Charter or Bylaw Provisions .....	30
Supermajority Shareholder Vote Requirements .....	31
Shareholder Ability to Call a Special Meeting .....	31
Shareholder Ability to Act by Written Consent .....	31
Advance Notice Requirements for Shareholder Proposals/Nominations .....	32
Fair Price Provisions .....	32
Greenmail .....	33
Confidential Voting .....	33
Control Share Acquisition Provisions .....	33
Control Share Cash-Out Provisions .....	33
Disgorgement Provisions .....	34
State Takeover Statutes .....	34
Freeze-Out Provisions .....	34
Reincorporation Proposals .....	34
Amend Bylaws without Shareholder Consent .....	35
Shareholder Litigation Rights .....	35
Federal Forum Selection Provisions .....	35
Exclusive Forum Provisions for State Law Matters .....	35
Fee Shifting .....	36
Takeover Defenses and Shareholder Rights-Related Shareholder Proposals .....	36
Shareholder Proposals to put Pill to a Vote and/or Adopt a Pill Policy .....	36
Reduce Supermajority Vote Requirements .....	36
Remove Antitakeover Provisions .....	36
Reimburse Proxy Solicitation Expenses .....	37
Virtual Shareholder Meetings .....	37
<b>4. Miscellaneous Governance Provisions .....</b>	<b>37</b>
Bundled Proposals .....	37
Adjourn Meeting .....	38
Changing Corporate Name .....	38
Amend Quorum Requirements .....	38
Amend Minor Bylaws .....	38
Other Business .....	39
<b>5. Capital Structure .....</b>	<b>39</b>
Common Stock Authorization .....	39
General Authorization Requests .....	39
Specific Authorization Requests .....	40
Issue Stock for Use with Rights Plan .....	40
Stock Distributions: Splits and Dividends .....	40
Reverse Stock Splits .....	40
Preferred Stock Authorization .....	41

General Authorization Requests.....	41
Specific Authorization Requests .....	42
Blank Check Preferred Stock.....	42
Adjustments to Par Value of Common Stock.....	42
Unequal Voting Rights/Dual Class Structure .....	43
Preemptive Rights.....	43
Debt Restructurings .....	43
Share Repurchase Programs.....	44
Conversion of Securities .....	44
Recapitalization .....	44
Tracking Stock.....	44
Share Issuance Mandates at U.S. Domestic Issuers Incorporated Outside the U.S.....	45
<b>6. Executive and Director Compensation .....</b>	<b>45</b>
Criteria for Evaluating Executive Pay .....	47
Pay-for-Performance Evaluation .....	47
Pay-for-Performance Elements .....	47
Pay Equity (Quantum) Elements.....	47
Problematic Pay Practices.....	48
Incentives that may Motivate Excessive Risk-Taking.....	49
Options Backdating.....	49
Board Communications and Responsiveness .....	49
Advisory Votes on Executive Compensation – Management Say-on-Pay Proposals.....	50
Frequency of Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation – Management Say on Pay .....	51
Advisory Vote on Golden Parachutes in an Acquisition, Merger, Consolidation, or Proposed Sale .....	51
Equity-Based Incentive Plans.....	52
Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT).....	53
Repricing Provisions.....	54
Pay-for-Performance Misalignment – Application to Equity Plans .....	54
Three-Year Value Adjusted Burn Rate .....	54
Liberal Definition of Change-in-Control.....	55
Other Compensation Plans .....	55
Amending Cash and Equity Plans (including Approval for Tax Deductibility (162(m)) .....	55
Employee Stock Purchase Plans (ESPPs).....	56
Qualified Plans .....	56
Non-Qualified Plans .....	56
Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs) .....	57
Option Exchange Programs/Repricing Options .....	57
Stock Plans in Lieu of Cash.....	58
Transfer Stock Option (TSO) Programs .....	58
401(k) Employee Benefit Plans .....	59
Severance Agreements for Executives/Golden Parachutes .....	59
Director Compensation.....	59
Shareholder Ratification of Director Pay Programs .....	60
Equity Plans for Non-Employee Directors .....	60
Outside Director Stock Awards/Options in Lieu of Cash .....	61
Director Retirement Plans .....	61

Shareholder Proposals on Compensation .....	61
Increase Disclosure of Executive Compensation .....	61
Limit Executive Compensation .....	61
Stock Ownership Requirements .....	62
Prohibit/Require Shareholder Approval for Option Repricing .....	62
Severance Agreements/Golden Parachutes .....	62
Cash Balance Plans .....	62
Performance-Based Equity Awards .....	63
Pay for Superior Performance .....	63
Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation (Say-on-Pay) Shareholder Proposals.....	64
Termination of Employment Prior to Severance Payment and Eliminating Accelerated Vesting of Unvested Equity.....	64
Tax Gross-up Proposals.....	64
Compensation Consultants - Disclosure of Board or Company's Utilization .....	65
Golden Coffins/Executive Death Benefits.....	65
Recoup Bonuses.....	65
Adopt Anti-Hedging/Pledging/Speculative Investments Policy.....	65
Bonus Banking .....	65
Hold Equity Past Retirement or for a Significant Period of Time.....	66
Non-Deductible Compensation .....	66
Pre-Arranged Trading Plans (10b5-1 Plans).....	66
<b>7. Mergers and Corporate Restructurings .....</b>	<b>66</b>
Mergers and Acquisitions .....	67
Corporate Reorganization/Restructuring Plans (Bankruptcy) .....	67
Special Purpose Acquisition Corporations (SPACs).....	68
Special Purpose Acquisition Corporations (SPACs) – Proposals for Extensions.....	68
Spin-offs .....	68
Asset Purchases .....	69
Asset Sales .....	69
Liquidations .....	69
Joint Ventures.....	69
Appraisal Rights .....	69
Going Private/Dark Transactions (Leveraged buyouts and Minority Squeeze-outs).....	69
Private Placements/Warrants/Convertible Debentures.....	70
Formation of Holding Company.....	70
Value Maximization Shareholder Proposals .....	71
<b>8. Social and Environmental Proposals .....</b>	<b>71</b>
Diversity and Equality .....	72
Diversity and Equality .....	72
Add Women and Minorities to the Board .....	73
Racial Equity and/or Civil Rights Audits .....	73
Report on the Distribution of Stock Options by Gender and Race .....	73
Prepare Report/Promote EEOC-Related Activities .....	73

Report on Progress Towards Glass Ceiling Commission Recommendations .....	74
Prohibit Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity .....	74
Report on/Eliminate Use of Racial Stereotypes in Advertising.....	74
Gender, Race, or Ethnicity Pay Gap .....	75
Labor and Human Rights .....	75
Codes of Conduct and Vendor Standards.....	75
Adopt/Report on MacBride Principles.....	76
Community Impact Assessment/Indigenous Peoples' Rights.....	76
Report on Risks of Outsourcing .....	77
Report on the Impact of Health Pandemics on Company Operations .....	77
Mandatory Arbitration .....	77
Sexual Harassment .....	77
Operations in High-Risk Markets .....	78
Reports on Operations in Burma/Myanmar .....	78
Reports on Operations in China.....	79
Product Sales to Repressive Regimes .....	79
Internet Privacy/Censorship and Data Security.....	79
Disclosure on Plant Closings .....	80
Climate Change.....	80
Say on Climate (SoC) Management Proposals.....	80
Say on Climate (SoC) Shareholder Proposals.....	81
Climate Change/Greenhouse Gas Emissions .....	81
Environmental Justice.....	82
Financed Emissions.....	82
Invest in Clean/Renewable Energy .....	82
Just Transition.....	82
Energy Efficiency.....	83
Natural Capital.....	83
Environment .....	83
Environmental/Sustainability Reports.....	84
Operations in Environmentally Sensitive Areas.....	84
Canadian Oil Sands .....	84
Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.....	85
Hydraulic Fracturing .....	85
Phase Out Chlorine-Based Chemicals .....	86
Land Procurement and Development .....	86
Report on the Sustainability of Concentrated Area Feeding Operations (CAFO) .....	86
Adopt a Comprehensive Recycling Policy .....	86
Nuclear Energy.....	87
Water Use.....	87
Compliance to relevant Climate Accords.....	87
Health and Safety .....	87
Toxic Materials.....	87
Product Safety .....	88
Workplace/Facility Safety .....	88

Report on Firearm Safety Initiatives .....	88
Phase-out or Label Products Containing Genetically Engineered Ingredients .....	88
Tobacco-related Proposals .....	89
Adopt Policy/Report on Drug Pricing .....	89
Government and Military .....	90
Prepare Report to Renounce Future Landmine Production .....	90
Prepare Report on Foreign Military Sales .....	90
Depleted Uranium/Nuclear Weapons .....	90
Adopt Ethical Criteria for Weapons Contracts .....	91
Animal Welfare .....	91
Animal Rights/Testing .....	91
Political and Charitable Giving .....	92
Lobbying Efforts .....	92
Political Contributions/Non-Partisanship .....	92
Political Expenditures and Lobbying Congruency .....	92
Charitable Contributions .....	93
Disclosure on Prior Government Service .....	93
Consumer Lending and Economic Development .....	93
Adopt Policy/Report on Predatory Lending Practices .....	93
Disclosure on Credit in Low- and Lower-middle-income countries (LMIC) or Forgive LMIC Debt .....	94
Community Investing .....	94
Miscellaneous .....	94
Adult Entertainment .....	94
Abortion/Right to Life Issues .....	95
Anti-Social Proposals .....	95
Tax Transparency .....	95
Violence and Adult Themes in Video Games .....	95
Link Compensation to Non-Financial Factors .....	95
<b>9. Mutual Fund Proxies .....</b>	<b>96</b>
Election of Trustees and Directors .....	96
Closed End Funds- Unilateral Opt-In to Control Share Acquisition Statutes .....	96
Investment Advisory Agreement .....	96
Changing a Fundamental Restriction to a Non-fundamental Restriction .....	97
Change Fundamental Investment Objective to Non-fundamental .....	97
Distribution Agreements .....	97
Approving New Classes or Series of Shares .....	97
Convert Closed-end Fund to Open-end Fund .....	97
Proxy Contests .....	98
Preferred Stock Proposals .....	98
Mergers .....	98
Business Development Companies – Authorization to Sell Shares of Common Stock at a Price below Net Asset Value .....	98
Change in Fund's Subclassification .....	99



Changing the Domicile of a Fund .....99

Disposition of Assets/Termination/Liquidation .....99

Authorizing the Board to Hire and Terminate Subadvisers Without Shareholder Approval .....99

Name Change Proposals .....99

1940 Act Policies .....99



## INTRODUCTION

ISS' Social Advisory Services division recognizes that socially responsible investors have dual objectives: financial and social. Socially responsible investors invest for economic gain, as do all investors, but they also require that the companies in which they invest conduct their business in a socially and environmentally responsible manner.

These dual objectives carry through to socially responsible investors' proxy voting activity once the security selection process is completed. In voting their shares, socially responsible institutional shareholders are concerned not only with sustainable economic returns to shareholders and good corporate governance but also with the ethical behavior of corporations and the social and environmental impact of their actions.

Social Advisory Services has, therefore, developed proxy voting guidelines that are consistent with the dual objectives of socially responsible shareholders. On matters of social and environmental import, the guidelines seek to reflect a broad consensus of the socially responsible investing community. Generally, we take as our frame of reference policies that have been developed by groups such as the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits of the United Methodist Church, Domini Social Investments, and other leading church shareholders and socially responsible mutual fund companies. Additionally, we incorporate the active ownership and investment philosophies of leading globally recognized initiatives such as the United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP FI), the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment (UNPRI), the United Nations Global Compact, and environmental and social European Union Directives.

On matters of corporate governance, executive compensation, and corporate structure, Social Advisory Services guidelines are based on a commitment to create and preserve economic value and to advance principles of good corporate governance consistent with responsibilities to society as a whole.

The guidelines provide an overview of how Social Advisory Services recommends that its clients vote. We note that there may be cases in which the final vote recommendation on a particular company varies from the vote guideline 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. Where Social Advisory Services acts as voting agent for its clients, it follows each client's voting policy, which may differ in some cases from the policies outlined in this document. Social Advisory Services updates its guidelines on an annual basis to take into account emerging issues and trends on environmental, social, and corporate governance topics, in addition to evolving market standards, regulatory changes, and client feedback.

# 1. Board of Directors

A corporation's board of directors sits at the apogee of the corporate governance system. Though they normally delegate responsibility for the management of the business to the senior executives they select and oversee, directors bear ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the corporation's business. The role of directors in publicly held corporations has undergone considerable change in recent years. Once derided as rubber stamps for management, directors of public corporations today are expected to serve as effective guardians of shareholders' interests.

Voting on directors and board-related issues is the most important use of the shareholder franchise, not simply a routine proxy item. Although uncontested director elections do not present alternative nominees from whom to choose, a high percentage of opposition votes is an expression of shareholder dissatisfaction and should be sufficient to elicit a meaningful response from management.

The role and responsibilities of directors has increasingly been the subject of much discussion and debate, given the current economic climate and the difficulties many companies now face in their respective markets. Influential organizations, including the American Law Institute, the American Bar Association, the National Association of Corporate Directors, and the Business Roundtable have issued reports and recommendations regarding the duties and accountability of corporate boards. Both mainstream and alternative media outlets have highlighted the numerous gaps within risk oversight of company boards and individual directors, and many institutional investors, in response, have capitalized on their rights as stakeholders to prompt changes. Corporations have taken notice, implementing many of the reforms championed by their shareholders.

Although differences of opinion remain, a fairly strong consensus has emerged on a number of key issues. It is widely agreed that the board's most important responsibility is to ensure that the corporation is managed in the shareholders' best long-term economic interest. This will often require boards to consider the impact of their actions on other constituencies, including employees, customers, local communities, and the environment.

- The board's principal functions are widely agreed to consist of the following:
- To select, evaluate, and if necessary, replace management, including the chief executive officer;
- To review and approve major strategies and financial objectives;
- To advise management on significant issues;
- To assure that effective controls are in place to safeguard corporate assets, manage risk, and comply with the law; and
- To nominate directors and otherwise ensure that the board functions effectively.

Boards are expected to have a majority of directors independent of management. The independent directors are expected to organize much of the board's work, even if the chief executive officer also serves as Chairman of the board. Key committees of the board are expected to be entirely independent of management. It is expected that boards will engage in critical self-evaluation of themselves and of individual members. Individual directors, in turn, are expected to devote significant amounts of time to their duties, to limit the number of directorships they accept, and to own a meaningful amount of stock in companies on whose boards they serve. Directors are ultimately responsible to the corporation's shareholders. The most direct expression of this responsibility is the requirement that directors be elected to their positions by the shareholders. Shareholders are also asked to vote on a number of other matters regarding the role, structure, and composition of the board. Social Advisory Services classifies directors as either executive, non-independent non-executive, or independent directors.

## Uncontested Election of Directors

Four broad principles apply when determining votes on director nominees:

1. **Board Accountability**: Accountability refers to the promotion of transparency into a company's governance practices and annual board elections and the provision to shareholders the ability to remove problematic directors and to vote on takeover defenses or other charter/bylaw amendments. These practices help reduce the opportunity for management entrenchment.
2. **Board Responsiveness**: Directors should be responsive to shareholders, particularly in regard to shareholder proposals that receive a majority vote or management proposals that receive significant opposition and to tender offers where a majority of shares are tendered. Furthermore, shareholders should expect directors to devote sufficient time and resources to oversight of the company.
3. **Director Independence**: Without independence from management, the board may be unwilling or unable to effectively set company strategy and scrutinize performance or executive compensation.
4. **Director Diversity/Competence**: Companies should seek a diverse board of directors who can add value to the board through their 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.

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

### Board Accountability

Vote against or withhold from the entire board of directors (except new nominees, who should be considered case-by-case) for the following:

### 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 an against/withhold recommendation is not up for election. All appropriate nominees (except new) may be held accountable.

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

**Director Performance Evaluation**: The board lacks mechanisms to promote accountability and oversight, coupled with sustained poor performance relative to peers. Sustained poor performance is measured by one-, three-, and five-year total shareholder returns in the bottom half of a company's four-digit GICS industry group (Russell 3000 companies only). Take into consideration the company's operational metrics and other factors as warranted. Problematic provisions include but are not limited to a classified board structure, supermajority vote requirements, a majority vote standard for director elections with no carve out for contested elections, inability for shareholders to call special meetings or act by written consent, a multi-class capital structure, and/or a non-shareholder approved poison pill.

---

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

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

- The company has a poison pill with a deadhand or slowhand feature<sup>2</sup>;
- 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 shareholders<sup>3</sup>.

Vote case-by-case on nominees if the board adopts an initial short-term pill<sup>2</sup> (with a term of one year or less) without shareholder approval, taking into consideration:

- The trigger threshold and other terms of the pill;
- The disclosed rationale for the adoption;
- The context in which the pill was adopted, (e.g., factors such as the company's size and stage of development, sudden changes in its market capitalization, and extraordinary industry-wide or macroeconomic events);
- A commitment to put any renewal to a shareholder vote;
- The company's overall track record on corporate governance and responsiveness to shareholders; 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 nominees, 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;
- 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;

---

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

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

- Adopted a fee-shifting provision; or
- Adopted another provision deemed egregious.

**Problematic Governance Structure:** For companies that hold or held their first annual meeting<sup>4</sup> of public shareholders after Feb. 1, 2015, generally vote against or withhold from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees, 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 nominees<sup>1</sup>, who should be considered case-by-case), if the company employs a common stock structure with unequal voting rights<sup>5</sup>.

Exceptions to this policy will generally be limited to:

- Newly-public companies<sup>6</sup> with a sunset provision of no more than seven years from the date of going public;
- Limited Partnerships and the Operating Partnership (OP) unit structure of REITs;
- Situations where the super-voting shares represent less than 5% of total voting power and therefore considered to be *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.

**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

---

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

<sup>5</sup> This generally includes classes of common stock that have additional votes per share than other shares; classes of shares that are not entitled to vote on all the same ballot items or nominees; or stock with time-phased voting rights ("loyalty shares").

<sup>6</sup> Newly-public companies generally include companies that emerge from bankruptcy, SPAC transactions, spin-offs, direct listings, and those who complete a traditional initial public offering.

- Previous use of ratification proposals to exclude shareholder proposals.

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

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

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

### Problematic Audit-Related Practices

Vote against/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/withhold from 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](#) including options backdating, excessive perks and overly generous employment contracts etc.;
- The board exhibits a significant level of [poor communication and responsiveness](#) to shareholders;
- The company reprices underwater options for stock, cash, or other consideration without prior shareholder approval, even if allowed in the firm's equity plan;
- 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.

## Material Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Risk Oversight Failures

Vote against/withhold from directors individually, committee members, or potentially the entire board, due to:

- Material failures of governance, stewardship, risk oversight<sup>7</sup>, 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 environmental, social and governance (ESG) risks;
- Failure to replace management as appropriate; or
- Egregious actions related to the 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 GHG emitters<sup>8</sup>, through its operations or value chain, 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 Social Advisory Services determines that the company is not taking the minimum steps needed to be aligned with a Net Zero by 2050 trajectory.

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 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.

---

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> Companies defined as "significant GHG emitters" will be those on the current Climate Action 100+ Focus Group list.



- The company has set a medium-term target for reducing its GHG emissions and the targets include scope 1, 2, and relevant scope 3 emissions.
- The company has a decarbonization strategy in place, with a defined set of quantitative and qualitative actions to reach Net Zero targets.

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

## Board 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.

## Director Independence

Vote against/withhold from the entire board if the full board is less than majority independent.

Vote against/withhold from non-independent directors (executive directors and non-independent non-executive directors per the [Categorization of Directors](#)) when:

- 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.

## Composition

**Attendance at Board and Committee Meetings:** Generally vote against or withhold from directors (except nominees who served only part of the fiscal year<sup>9</sup>) who attend less than 75 percent of the aggregate of their board and committee meetings for the period for which they served, unless an acceptable reason for absences is disclosed in the proxy or another SEC filing. Acceptable reasons for director absences are generally limited to the following:

- Medical issues/illness;
- Family emergencies; and
- If the director's total service was three meetings or fewer and the director missed only one meeting.

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:** Vote against or withhold from individual directors who:

- Sit on more than five public company boards; or
- Are CEOs of public companies who sit on the boards of more than two public companies besides their own—withhold only at their outside boards<sup>10</sup>.

## Board Diversity

*NOTE: For shareholder meeting reports published on or after February 25th, 2025, Institutional Shareholder Services (ISS) has indefinitely halted the consideration of the gender and racial and/or ethnic diversity of a*

---

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

<sup>10</sup> Although all of a CEO's subsidiary boards will be counted as separate boards, Social 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.

company's board when making vote recommendations with respect to the election or re-election of directors at U.S. companies covered by these guidelines under its proprietary ISS U.S. SRI Specialty policy.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Generally vote against or withhold from incumbent nominating committee members if:

- The board is not comprised of at least 40 percent underrepresented gender identities<sup>11</sup>; or
- The board is not comprised of at least 20 percent racially or ethnically diverse directors.

Vote against or withhold from other directors on a case-by-case basis.

## Classification of Directors – U.S.

1. **Executive Director**
  - 1.1. Current officer<sup>i</sup> of the company or one of its affiliates<sup>ii</sup>.
2. **Non-Independent Non-Executive Director**

Board Identification

  - 2.1. Director identified as not independent by 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 Related Company

  - 2.3. Non-officer employee of the firm (including employee representatives).
  - 2.4. Officer<sup>i</sup>, 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<sup>iii,iv</sup>.
  - 2.6. Former non-CEO officer<sup>i</sup> of the company or an affiliate<sup>ii</sup> within the past five years.
  - 2.7. Former officer<sup>i</sup> of an acquired company within the past five years<sup>iv</sup>.
  - 2.8. Officer<sup>i</sup> 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<sup>v</sup>.

Family Members

  - 2.10. Immediate family member<sup>vi</sup> of a current or former officer<sup>i</sup> of the company or its affiliates<sup>ii</sup> within the last five years.
  - 2.11. Immediate family member<sup>vi</sup> of a current employee of company or its affiliates<sup>ii</sup> where additional factors raise concern (which may include, but are not limited to, the following: a director related to numerous employees; the company or its affiliates employ relatives of numerous board members; or a non-Section 16 officer in a key strategic role).

Professional, Transactional, and Charitable Relationships

  - 2.12. Director who (or whose immediate family member<sup>vi</sup>) currently provides professional services<sup>vii</sup> in excess of \$10,000 per year to: the company, an affiliate<sup>ii</sup>, or an individual officer of the company or an affiliate; or who is (or whose immediate family member<sup>vi</sup> is) a partner, employee, or controlling shareholder of an organization which provides the services.
  - 2.13. Director who (or whose immediate family member<sup>vi</sup>) currently has any material transactional relationship<sup>viii</sup> with the company or its affiliates<sup>ii</sup>; or who is (or whose immediate family member<sup>vi</sup> is) a partner in, or a controlling shareholder or an executive officer of, an organization which has the material transactional relationship<sup>viii</sup> (excluding investments in the company through a private placement).

<sup>11</sup> Underrepresented gender identities include directors who identify as women or as non-binary.

2.14. Director who (or whose immediate family member<sup>vi</sup>) is a trustee, director, or employee of a charitable or non-profit organization that receives material grants or endowments<sup>viii</sup> from the company or its affiliates<sup>ii</sup>.

Other Relationships

2.15. Party to a voting agreement<sup>ix</sup> to vote in line with management on proposals being brought to shareholder vote.

2.16. Has (or an immediate family member<sup>vi</sup> has) an interlocking relationship as defined by the SEC involving members of the board of directors or its compensation committee<sup>x</sup>.

2.17. Founder<sup>xi</sup> of the company but not currently an employee.

2.18. Director with pay comparable to Named Executive Officers.

2.19. Any material<sup>xii</sup> relationship with the company.

**3. Independent Director**

3.1. No material<sup>xiii</sup> connection to the company other than a board seat.

**Footnotes:**

<sup>i</sup> The definition of officer will generally follow that of a “Section 16 officer” (officers subject to Section 16 of the Securities and Exchange Act of 1934) and includes: the chief executive, operating, financial, legal, technology, and accounting officers of a company (including the president, treasurer, secretary, controller, or any vice president in charge of a principal business unit, division, or policy function). Current interim officers are included in this category. For private companies, the equivalent positions are applicable. A non-employee director serving as an officer due to statutory requirements (e.g. corporate secretary) will generally be classified as a Non-Independent Non-Executive Director under “Any material relationship with the company.” However, if the company provides explicit disclosure that the director is not receiving additional compensation exceeding \$10,000 per year for serving in that capacity, then the director will be classified as an Independent Director.

<sup>ii</sup> “Affiliate” includes a subsidiary, sibling company, or parent company. Social 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.

<sup>iii</sup> Includes any former CEO of the company prior to the company’s initial public offering (IPO).

<sup>iv</sup> When there is a former CEO of a special purpose acquisition company (SPAC) serving on the board of an acquired company, Social 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.

<sup>v</sup> Social 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. Social Advisory Services will also consider if a formal search process was under way for a full-time officer at the time.

<sup>vi</sup> “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.

<sup>vii</sup> 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.

<sup>viii</sup> 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, Social Advisory Services will apply the NASDAQ-based materiality test. (The recipient is the party receiving the financial proceeds from the transaction).

<sup>ix</sup> Dissident directors who are parties to a voting agreement pursuant to a settlement or similar arrangement may be classified as independent directors if an analysis of the following factors indicates that the voting agreement does not compromise their alignment with all shareholders' interests: the terms of the agreement; the duration of the standstill provision in the agreement; the limitations and requirements of actions that are agreed upon; if the dissident director nominee(s) is subject to the standstill; and if there any conflicting relationships or related party transactions.

<sup>x</sup> 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).

<sup>xi</sup> The operating involvement of the founder with the company will be considered; if the founder was never employed by the company, Social Advisory Services may deem him or her an independent outsider.

<sup>xii</sup> For purposes of Social 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.

## Board-Related Management Proposals

### Classification/Declassification of the Board

Under a classified board structure only one class of directors would stand for election each year, and the directors in each class would generally serve three-year terms. Although staggered boards can provide continuity for companies at the board level, there are also a number of downsides to the structure. First, a classified board can also be used to entrench management and effectively preclude most takeover bids or proxy contests. Board classification forces dissidents and would-be acquirers to negotiate with the incumbent board, which has the authority to decide on offers without a shareholder vote. In addition, when a board is classified, it is difficult to remove individual members for either poor attendance or poor performance; shareholders would only have the chance to vote on a given director every third year when he or she comes up for election. The classified board structure can also limit shareholders' ability to withhold votes from inside directors that sit on key board committee, or to withhold votes from an entire board slate to protest the lack of board diversity. According to ISS' 2012 Board Practices study, the number of S&P 500 companies with classified boards has continued to fall. In 2015, only 17 percent of S&P 500 companies maintained staggered boards, compared to 25 percent in 2014, 30 percent in 2013, and 39 percent in 2010. While we recognize that there are some advantages to classified boards, based on the latest studies on classified boards, the fact that classified boards can make it more difficult for shareholders to remove individual directors, and the fact that classified boards can be used as an antitakeover device, Social Advisory Services recommends against the adoption of classified boards.

#### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for proposals to repeal classified boards and to elect all directors annually.
- Vote against proposals to classify (stagger) the board of directors.

## Majority Vote Threshold for Director Elections

**Social Advisory Services 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 plurality in contested elections is included.

## Cumulative Voting

Most corporations provide that shareholders are entitled to cast one vote for each share owned. Under a cumulative voting scheme the shareholder is permitted to have one vote per share for each director to be elected. Shareholders are permitted to apportion those votes in any manner they wish among the director candidates. Shareholders have the opportunity to elect a minority representative to a board through cumulative voting, thereby ensuring representation for all sizes of shareholders. For example, if there is a company with a ten-member board and 500 shares outstanding—the total number of votes that may be cast is 5,000. In this case a shareholder with 51 shares (10.2 percent of the outstanding shares) would be guaranteed one board seat because all votes may be cast for one candidate.

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

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

## Director and Officer Indemnification, Liability Protection, and Exculpation

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals on director and officer indemnification, liability protection, and exculpation<sup>13</sup>.

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

- Eliminate 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.

---

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

<sup>13</sup> **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.

- 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 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 individual's legal expenses would be covered.

## Shareholder Ability to Remove Directors/Fill Vacancies

Shareholder ability to remove directors, with or without cause, is either prescribed by a state's business corporation law, an individual company's articles of incorporation, or its bylaws. Many companies have sought shareholder approval for charter or bylaw amendments that would prohibit the removal of directors except for cause, thus ensuring that directors would retain their directorship for their full-term unless found guilty of self-dealing. By requiring cause to be demonstrated through due process, management insulates the directors from removal even if a director has been performing poorly, not attending meetings, or not acting in the best interests of shareholders.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote against proposals that provide that directors may be removed only for cause.
- Vote for proposals to restore shareholder 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.

## Board Size

Proposals which would allow management to increase or decrease the size of the board at its own discretion are often used by companies as a takeover defense. Social Advisory Services supports management proposals to fix the size of the board at a specific number, thus preventing management, when facing a proxy contest, from increasing the board size without shareholder approval. By increasing the size of the board, management can make it more difficult for dissidents to gain control of the board. Fixing the size of the board also prevents a reduction in the size of the board as a strategy to oust independent directors. Fixing board size also prevents management from increasing the number of directors in order to dilute the effects of cumulative voting.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for proposals that seek to fix the size of the board.
- Vote case-by-case on proposals that seek to change the size or range of the board.
- Vote against proposals that give management the ability to alter the size of the board outside of a specific range without shareholder approval.



## Establish/Amend Nominee Qualifications

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals that establish or amend director qualifications. Votes should be based on how reasonable the criteria are and to what degree they may preclude dissident nominees from joining the board.

## 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

**Social Advisory Services 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.

### Age Limits

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

## Board-Related Shareholder Proposals/Initiatives

### Proxy Contests/Proxy Access

Contested elections of directors frequently occur when a board candidate or slate runs for the purpose of seeking a significant change in corporate policy or control. Competing slates will be evaluated based upon the personal qualifications of the candidates, the economic impact of the policies that they advance, and their expressed and demonstrated commitment to the interests of all shareholders.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Votes in a contested election of directors are evaluated on a case-by-case basis, considering the following factors:

- Long-term financial performance of the target company relative to its industry;
- Management's track record;
- Background to the proxy contest;
- Qualifications of director nominees (both slates);
- Strategic plan of dissident slate and quality of critique against management;
- Likelihood that the proposed goals and objectives can be achieved (both slates);
- Stock ownership positions; and
- Impact on stakeholders, such as job loss, community lending, equal opportunity, impact on environment.

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).

## Annual Election (Declassification) of the Board

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals to repeal classified (staggered) boards and to elect all directors annually.

Vote against proposals to classify the board.

## Majority Threshold Voting Shareholder Proposals

A majority vote standard requires that for directors to be elected (or re-elected) to serve on the company's board they must receive support from holders of a majority of shares voted. Shareholders have expressed strong support for shareholder proposals on majority threshold voting. Social Advisory Services believes shareholders should have a greater voice in the election of directors and believes majority threshold voting represents a viable alternative to the plurality system in the U.S. 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.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for precatory and binding 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.

## Majority of Independent Directors

Social Advisory Services believes that a board independent from management is of vital importance to a company and its shareholders. Accordingly, Social Advisory Services will cast votes in a manner that shall encourage the independence of boards.

**Social Advisory Services 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 Social Advisory Services' [definition](#) of independence.
- Vote for shareholder proposals to strengthen the definition of independence for board directors.

## Establishment of Independent Committees

Most corporate governance experts agree that the key board committees (audit, compensation, and nominating/corporate governance) of a corporation should include only independent directors. The independence of key committees has been encouraged by regulation. Social Advisory Services believes that initiatives to increase the independent representation of these committees or to require that these committees be independent should be supported.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals asking that board audit, compensation, and/or nominating committees be composed exclusively of independent directors.

## Independent Board Chair

One of the principle functions of the board is to monitor and evaluate the performance of the CEO. The chairperson's duty to oversee management is obviously compromised when he or she is required to monitor himself or herself. Generally Social Advisory Services recommends a vote for 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.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals that would require the board chair to be independent of management.

## Establishment of Board Committees

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Generally vote for shareholder proposals to establish a new board committee to address broad corporate policy topics or to provide a forum for ongoing dialogue on issues such as the environment, human or labor rights, shareholder relations, occupational health and safety etc. when the formation of such committees appears to be a potentially effective method of protecting or enhancing shareholder value. In evaluating such proposals, 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.

## Establish/Amend Nominee Qualifications

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

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

Vote case-by-case on shareholder resolutions seeking a director nominee candidate 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.

## Board Policy on Shareholder Engagement

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholders 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;
- The company has not ignored majority-supported shareholder proposals or a majority withhold vote on a director nominee; and
- The company has an independent chairman or a lead director (according to [Social Advisory Services' definition](#)). This individual must be made available for periodic consultation and direct communication with major shareholders.

## Proxy Access

Social Advisory Services supports proxy access as an important shareholder right, one that is complementary to other best-practice corporate governance features. However, in the absence of a uniform standard, proposals to enact proxy access may vary widely; as such, a case-by-case approach will be undertaken in evaluating these proposals.

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## Board Refreshment

### Term/Tenure Limits

Supporters of term limits argue that this requirement would bring new ideas and approaches to a board. However, we prefer to look at directors and their contributions to the board individually rather than impose a strict rule.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** 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

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

## CEO Succession Planning

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## Vote No Campaigns

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## 2. Ratification of Auditors

Annual election of the outside accountants is best practice standard. While it is recognized that the company is in the best position to evaluate the competence of the outside accountants, we believe that outside accountants must ultimately be accountable to shareholders. A Blue Ribbon Commission report concluded that audit committees must improve their current level of oversight of independent accountants. Given the rash of accounting misdeeds that were not detected by audit panels or auditors, shareholder ratification is an essential step in restoring investor confidence. Shareholders should have the right to weigh in on the choice of the audit firm, and all companies should put ratification on the ballot of their annual meeting. Special consideration will be given when non-audit fees exceed audit fees, as high non-audit fees can compromise the independence of the auditor. Social Advisory Services will also monitor both auditor tenure and whether auditor ratification has been pulled from the ballot.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for proposals to ratify auditors, unless any of the following apply:

- The non-audit fees paid represent 25 percent or more of the total fees paid to the auditor;
- 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; or
- 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.

## Auditor-Related Shareholder Proposals

### Ratify Auditors/Ensure Auditor Independence

These shareholder proposals request that the board allow shareholders to ratify the company's auditor at each annual meeting. Annual ratification of the outside accountants is standard practice. While it is recognized that the company is in the best position to evaluate the competence of the outside accountants, we believe that outside accountants must ultimately be accountable to shareholders.

Given the rash of accounting irregularities that were not detected by audit panels or auditors, shareholder ratification is an essential step in restoring investor confidence. Social Advisory Services believes that shareholders should have the ability to ratify the auditor on an annual basis.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote for shareholder proposals to allow shareholders to vote on auditor ratification.
- Vote for proposals that ask a company to adopt a policy on auditor independence.
- Vote for proposals that seek to limit the non-audit services provided by the company's auditor.

## Auditor Rotation

To minimize any conflict of interest that may rise between the company and its auditor, Social Advisory Services supports the rotation of auditors. Currently, SEC rules provide that partners should be rotated every five years. However, Social Advisory Services also believes that the long tenure of audit firms at U.S. companies can be problematic.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals to rotate company's auditor every five years or more. Social Advisory Services believes that proposing a rotation period less than five years is unreasonably restrictive and may negatively affect audit quality and service while increasing expense.

## 3. Takeover Defenses / Shareholder Rights

Corporate takeover attempts come in various guises. Usually, a would-be acquirer makes a direct offer to the board of directors of a targeted corporation. The bidder may offer to purchase the company for cash and/or stock. If the board approves the offer, a friendly transaction is completed and presented to shareholders for approval. If, however, the board of directors rejects the bid, the acquirer can make a tender offer for the shares directly to the targeted corporation's shareholders. Such offers are referred to as hostile tender bids.

Not wishing to wait until they are subjects of hostile takeover attempts, many corporations have adopted antitakeover measures designed to deter unfriendly bids or buy time. The most common defenses are the shareholders rights protection plan, also known as the poison pill, and charter amendments that create barriers to acceptance of hostile bids. In the U.S., poison pills do not require shareholder approval. However, shareholders must approve charter amendments, such as classified boards or supermajority vote requirements. In brief, the very existence of defensive measures can foreclose the possibility of tenders and hence, opportunities to premium prices for shareholders.

Anti-takeover statutes generally increase management's potential for insulating itself and warding off hostile takeovers that may be beneficial to shareholders. While it may be true that some boards use such devices to obtain higher bids and to enhance shareholder value, it is more likely that such provisions are used to entrench management. The majority of historical evidence on individual corporate anti-takeover measures indicates that heavily insulated companies generally realize lower returns than those having managements that are more accountable to shareholders and the market. The evidence also suggests that when states adopt their own anti-takeover devices, or endorse those employed by firms, shareholder returns are harmed. Moreover, the body of evidence appears to indicate that companies in states with the strongest anti-takeover laws experience lower returns than they would absent such statutes.

## Takeover Defenses and Shareholder Rights-Related Management Proposals

### Poison Pills (Shareholder Rights Plans)

Poison pills are corporate-sponsored financial devices that, when triggered by potential acquirers, do one or more of the following: 1) dilute the acquirer's equity holdings in the target company; 2) dilute the acquirer's voting interests in the target company; or 3) dilute the acquirer's equity holdings in the post-merger company. Poison pills generally allow shareholders to purchase shares from, or sell shares back to, the target company (flip-in pill) and/or the potential acquirer (flip-out pill) at a price far out of line with fair market value. Depending on the type of pill, the triggering event can either transfer wealth from the target company or dilute the equity holdings of current shareholders. Poison pills insulate management from the threat of a change in control and provide the target board with veto power over takeover bids. Because poison pills greatly alter the balance of power between shareholders and management, shareholders should be allowed to make their own evaluation of such plans.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on management proposals on poison pill ratification, focusing on the features of the shareholder rights plan. Rights plans should contain the following attributes:

- No lower than a 20 percent trigger, flip-in or flip-over provision;
- A term of no more than three years;
- No deadhand, slowhand, no-hand or similar feature that limits the ability of a future board to redeem the pill;
- Shareholder redemption feature (qualifying offer clause); if the board refuses to redeem the pill 90 days after a qualifying offer is announced, 10 percent of the shares may call a special meeting or seek a written consent to vote on rescinding the pill.

In addition, the rationale for adopting the pill should be thoroughly explained by the company. In examining the request for the pill, take into consideration the company's existing governance structure, including: board independence, existing takeover defenses, and any problematic governance concerns.

### Net Operating Loss (NOL) Poison Pills/Protective Amendments

The financial crisis has prompted widespread losses in certain industries. This has resulted in previously profitable companies considering the adoption of a poison pill and/or NOL protective amendment to protect their NOL tax assets, which may be lost upon an acquisition of 5 percent of a company's shares.

When evaluating management proposals seeking to adopt NOL pills or protective amendments, the purpose behind the proposal, its terms, and the company's existing governance structure should be taken into account to assess whether the structure actively promotes board entrenchment or adequately protects shareholder rights. While Social Advisory Services acknowledges the high estimated tax value of NOLs, which benefit shareholders, the ownership acquisition limitations contained in an NOL pill/protective amendment coupled with a company's problematic governance structure could serve as an antitakeover device.

Given the fact that shareholders will want to ensure that such an amendment does not remain in effect permanently, Social Advisory Services will also closely review whether the pill/amendment contains a sunset provision or a commitment to cause the expiration of the NOL pill/protective amendment upon exhaustion or expiration of the NOLs.



**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote against proposals to adopt a poison pill for the stated purpose of protecting a company's net operating losses ("NOLs") 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%);
- 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.

Vote against proposals to adopt a protective amendment for the stated purpose of protecting a company's net operating losses ("NOLs") 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 five-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;
- Any other factors that may be applicable.

## Ratification Proposals: Management Proposals to Ratify Existing Charter or Bylaw Provisions

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## Supermajority Shareholder Vote Requirements

Supermajority provisions violate the principle that a simple majority of voting shares should be all that is necessary to effect change at a company.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for proposals to reduce supermajority shareholder vote requirements for charter amendments, mergers and other significant business combinations. For companies with shareholder(s) who own a significant amount of company stock, vote case-by-case, taking into account: a) ownership structure; b) quorum requirements; and c) supermajority vote requirements.
- Vote against proposals to require a supermajority shareholder vote for charter amendments, mergers and other significant business combinations.

## Shareholder Ability to Call a Special Meeting

Most state corporation statutes allow shareholders to call a special meeting when they want to take action on certain matters that arise between regularly scheduled annual meetings. Sometimes this right applies only if a shareholder or a group of shareholders own a specified percentage of shares, with 10 percent being the most common. Shareholders may lose the ability to remove directors, initiate a shareholder resolution, or respond to a beneficial offer without having to wait for the next scheduled meeting if they are unable to act at a special meeting of their own calling.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for proposals that provide shareholders with the ability to call special meetings taking into account: a) shareholders' current right to call special meetings; b) minimum ownership threshold necessary to call special meetings (10% preferred); c) the inclusion of exclusionary or prohibitive language; d) investor ownership structure; and e) shareholder support of and management's response to previous shareholder proposals.
- Vote against proposals to restrict or prohibit shareholders' ability to call special meetings.

## Shareholder Ability to Act by Written Consent

Consent solicitations allow shareholders to vote on and respond to shareholder and management proposals by mail without having to act at a physical meeting. A consent card is sent by mail for shareholder approval and only requires a signature for action. Some corporate bylaws require supermajority votes for consents while at others, standard annual meeting rules apply. Shareholders may lose the ability to remove directors, initiate a shareholder resolution, or respond to a beneficial offer without having to wait for the next scheduled meeting if they are unable to act at a special meeting of their own calling.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally vote against proposals to restrict or prohibit shareholders' ability to take action by written consent.
- Vote for proposals to allow or facilitate shareholder action by written consent, taking into consideration: a) shareholders' current right to act by written consent; b) consent threshold; c) the inclusion of exclusionary or prohibitive language; d) investor ownership structure; and e) 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; a) an unfettered<sup>14</sup> right for shareholders to call special meetings at a 10 percent threshold; b) a majority vote standard in uncontested director elections; c) no non-shareholder-approved pill, and; d) an annually elected board.

## Advance Notice Requirements for Shareholder Proposals/Nominations

In 2008, the Delaware courts handed down two decisions, which, read together, indicate a judicial move toward a narrower interpretation of companies' advance notice bylaws. These recent court decisions have encouraged companies to take a closer look at their bylaw provisions to ensure that broad language does not provide loopholes for activist investors. Specifically, companies are including language designed to provide more detailed advance notice provisions and to ensure full disclosure of economic and voting interests in a shareholder's notice of proposals, including derivatives and hedged positions.

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

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

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

## Fair Price Provisions

Fair price provisions were originally designed to specifically defend against the most coercive of takeover devices, the two-tiered, front-end loaded tender offer. In such a hostile takeover, the bidder offers cash for enough shares to gain control of the target. At the same time the acquirer states that once control has been obtained, the target's remaining shares will be purchased with cash, cash and securities or only securities. Since the payment offered for the remaining stock is, by design less valuable than the original offer for the controlling shares, shareholders are forced to sell out early to maximize their value. Standard fair price provisions require that, absent board or shareholder approval of the acquisition, the bidder must pay the remaining shareholders the same price for their shares that brought control.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote case-by-case on proposals to adopt fair price provisions 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.

---

<sup>14</sup> "Unfettered" means no restrictions on agenda items, no restrictions on the number of shareholders who can group together to reach the 10 percent threshold, and only reasonable limits on when a meeting can be called: no greater than 30 days after the last annual meeting and no greater than 90 prior to the next annual meeting.

## 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 shares, the practice discriminates against most shareholders. This transferred cash, absent the greenmail payment, could be put to much better use for reinvestment in the company, payment of dividends, or to fund a public share repurchase program.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for proposals to adopt antigreenmail charter or bylaw amendments or otherwise restrict a company's ability to make greenmail payments.
- Review on a case-by-case basis antigreenmail proposals when they are bundled with other charter or bylaw amendments.

## Confidential Voting

Confidential voting, or voting by secret ballot, is one of the key structural issues in the proxy system. It ensures that all votes are based on the merits of proposals and cast in the best interests of fiduciary clients and pension plan beneficiaries. In a confidential voting system, only vote tabulators and inspectors of election may examine individual proxies and ballots; management and shareholders are given only vote totals. In an open voting system, management can determine who has voted against its nominees or proposals and then re-solicit those votes before the final vote count. As a result, shareholders can be pressured to vote with management at companies with which they maintain, or would like to establish, a business relationship. Confidential voting also protects employee shareholders from retaliation. Shares held by employee stock ownership plans, for example, are important votes that are typically voted by employees.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for management proposals to adopt confidential voting.

## 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.

### Social Advisory Services 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.

**Social Advisory Services 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.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for proposals to opt out of state disgorgement provisions.

## State Takeover Statutes

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to opt in or out of state takeover statutes (including control share acquisition statutes, control share cash-out statutes, freezeout provisions, fair price provisions, stakeholder laws, poison pill endorsements, severance pay and labor contract provisions, antigreenmail provisions, and disgorgement provisions).

Vote for opting into stakeholder protection statutes if they provide comprehensive protections for employees and community stakeholders. Social Advisory Services would be less supportive of takeover statutes that only serve to protect incumbent management from accountability to shareholders and which negatively influence shareholder value.

## 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.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for proposals to opt out of state freeze-out provisions.

## Reincorporation Proposals

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to change a company's state of incorporation 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;
- Comparison of corporation laws of original state and destination state.

Reincorporations into "tax havens" will be given special consideration.

While a firm's country of incorporation will remain the primary basis for evaluating companies, Social Advisory Services will generally apply U.S. policies to the extent possible with respect to issuers that file DEF 14As, 10-K annual reports, and 10-Q quarterly reports, and are thus considered domestic issuers by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Corporations that have reincorporated outside the U.S. have found themselves subject to a combination of governance regulations and best practice standards that may not be entirely compatible with an evaluation framework based solely on country of incorporation.

## Amend Bylaws without Shareholder Consent

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## 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.

**Social Advisory Services 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).

**Social Advisory Services 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.

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

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

## Takeover Defenses and Shareholder Rights-Related Shareholder Proposals

### Shareholder Proposals to put Pill to a Vote and/or Adopt a Pill Policy

**Social Advisory Services 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.

### Reduce Supermajority Vote Requirements

Supermajority provisions violate the principle that a simple majority of voting shares should be all that is necessary to effect change regarding a company.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote for shareholder proposals to lower supermajority shareholder vote requirements for charter and bylaw amendments.
- Vote for shareholder proposals to lower supermajority shareholder vote requirements for mergers and other significant business combinations.

### Remove Antitakeover Provisions

There are numerous antitakeover mechanisms available to corporations that can make takeovers prohibitively expensive for a bidder or at least guarantee that all shareholders are treated equally. The debate over antitakeover



devices centers on whether these devices enhance or detract from shareholder value. One theory argues that a company's board, when armed with these takeover protections, may use them as negotiating tools to obtain a higher premium for shareholders. The opposing view maintains that managements afforded such protection are more likely to become entrenched than to actively pursue the best interests of shareholders. Such takeover defenses also serve as obstacles to the normal functioning of the marketplace which, when operating efficiently, should replace incapable and poorly performing managements.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals that seek to remove antitakeover provisions.

## Reimburse Proxy Solicitation Expenses

**Social Advisory Services 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.

Vote for shareholder proposals calling for the reimbursement of reasonable costs incurred in connection with nominating one or more candidates in a contested election where the following apply:

- The election of fewer than 50 percent of the directors to be elected is contested in the election;
- One or more of the dissident's candidates is elected;
- Shareholders are not permitted to cumulate their votes for directors;
- The election occurred, and the expenses were incurred, after the adoption of this bylaw.

## Virtual Shareholder Meetings

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Generally vote for management proposals allowing for the convening of shareholder meetings by electronic means, so long as they do not preclude in-person meetings. Companies are encouraged to disclose the circumstances under which virtual-only<sup>15</sup> meetings would be held, and to allow for comparable rights and opportunities for shareholders to participate electronically as they would have during an in-person meeting.

Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals concerning virtual-only meetings, considering:

- Scope and rationale of the proposal; and
- Concerns identified with the company's prior meeting practices.

# 4. Miscellaneous Governance Provisions

## Bundled Proposals

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Review on a case-by-case basis bundled or "conditional" proxy proposals. In the case of items that are conditioned upon each other, examine the benefits and costs of the

---

<sup>15</sup> Virtual-only shareholder meeting" refers to a meeting of shareholders that is held exclusively using technology without a corresponding in-person meeting.

packaged items. In instances where 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.

## Adjourn Meeting

Companies may ask shareholders to adjourn a meeting in order to solicit more votes. Generally, shareholders already have enough information to make their vote decisions. Once their votes have been cast, there is no justification for spending more money to continue pressing shareholders for more votes.

### Social Advisory Services 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."

## Changing Corporate Name

Proposals to change a company's name are generally routine matters. Generally, the name change reflects a change in corporate direction or the result of a merger agreement.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for changing the corporate name unless there is compelling evidence that the change would adversely affect shareholder value.

## Amend Quorum Requirements

**Social Advisory Services 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

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for bylaw or charter changes that are of a housekeeping nature (updates or corrections).

## Other Business

Other business proposals are routine items to allow shareholders to raise other issues and discuss them at the meeting. Only issues that may be legally discussed at meetings may be raised under this authority. However, shareholders cannot know the content of these issues so they are generally not supported.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Generally vote against other business proposals.

## 5. Capital Structure

The equity in a corporate enterprise (that is, the residual value of the company's assets after the payment of all debts) belongs to the shareholders. Equity securities may be employed, or manipulated, in a manner that will ultimately enhance or detract from shareholder value. As such, certain actions undertaken by management in relation to a company's capital structure can be of considerable significance to shareholders. Changes in capitalization usually require shareholder approval or ratification.

### Common Stock Authorization

State statutes and stock exchanges require shareholder approval for increases in the number of common shares. Corporations increase their supply of common stock for a variety of ordinary business purposes: raising new capital, funding stock compensation programs, business acquisitions, and implementation of stock splits or payment of stock dividends.

### General Authorization Requests

**Social Advisory Services 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

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## Issue Stock for Use with Rights Plan

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote against proposals that increase authorized common stock for the explicit purpose of implementing a non-shareholder approved shareholder rights plan (poison pill).

## Stock Distributions: Splits and Dividends

**Social Advisory Services 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 Social Advisory Services' Common Stock Authorization policy.

## Reverse Stock Splits

Reverse splits exchange multiple shares for a lesser amount to increase share price. Increasing share price is sometimes necessary to restore a company's share price to a level that will allow it to be traded on the national stock exchanges. In addition, some brokerage houses have a policy of not monitoring or investing in very low priced shares. Reverse stock splits help maintain stock liquidity.

**Social Advisory Services 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 Social 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.

## Preferred Stock Authorization

Preferred stock is an equity security which has certain features similar to debt instruments, such as fixed dividend payments, seniority of claims to common stock, and in most cases no voting rights. The terms of blank check preferred stock give the board of directors the power to issue shares of preferred stock at their discretion—with voting rights, conversion, distribution and other rights to be determined by the board at time of issue. Blank check preferred stock can be used for sound corporate purposes but could be used as a device to thwart hostile takeovers without shareholder approval.

## General Authorization Requests

**Social Advisory Services 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 services:

- If share usage (outstanding plus reserved) is less than 50% of the current authorized shares, vote for an increase of up to **50%** of current authorized shares.
- If share usage is 50% to 100% of the current authorized, vote for an increase of up to **100%** of current authorized shares.
- If share usage is greater than current authorized shares, vote for an increase of up to the current share usage.
- In the case of a stock split, the allowable increase is calculated (per above) based on the post-split adjusted authorization.
- If no preferred shares are currently issued and outstanding, vote against the request, unless the company discloses a specific use for the shares.

Generally vote against proposed increases, even if within the above ratios, if the proposal or the company's prior or ongoing use of authorized shares is problematic, including, but not limited to:

- If the shares requested are blank check preferred shares that can be used for antitakeover purposes;<sup>16</sup>
- The company seeks to increase a class of non-convertible preferred shares entitled to more than one vote per share on matters that do not solely affect the rights of preferred stockholders "supervoting shares");
- The company seeks to increase a class of convertible preferred shares entitled to a number of votes greater than the number of common shares into which they'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.

---

<sup>16</sup> To be acceptable, appropriate disclosure would be needed that the shares are "declawed": i.e., representation by the board that it will not, without prior stockholder approval, issue or use the preferred stock for any defensive or anti-takeover purpose or for the purpose of implementing any stockholder rights plan.

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

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## Blank Check Preferred Stock

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote against proposals that would authorize the creation of new classes of preferred stock with unspecified voting, conversion, dividend distribution, and other rights ("blank check" preferred stock).
- Vote against proposals to increase the number of blank check preferred stock authorized for issuance when no shares have been issued or reserved for a specific purpose.
- Vote for proposals to create "declawed" blank check preferred stock (stock that cannot be used as a takeover defense).
- Vote for requests to require shareholder approval for blank check authorizations.

## Adjustments to Par Value of Common Stock

Stock that has a fixed per share value that is on its certificate is called par value stock. The purpose of par value stock is to establish the maximum responsibility of a stockholder in the event that a corporation becomes insolvent. Proposals to reduce par value come from certain state level requirements for regulated industries such as banks, and other legal requirements relating to the payment of dividends.

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## Unequal Voting Rights/Dual Class Structure

Incumbent managers use unequal voting rights with the voting rights of their common shares superior to other shareholders in order to concentrate their power and insulate themselves from the wishes of the majority of shareholders. Dual class exchange offers involve a transfer of voting rights from one group of shareholders to another group of shareholders typically through the payment of a preferential dividend. A dual class recapitalization also establishes two classes of common stock with unequal voting rights, but initially involves an equal distribution of preferential and inferior voting shares to current shareholders.

**Social Advisory Services 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, including: a) the company's auditor has concluded that there is substantial doubt about the company's ability to continue as a going concern; or b) 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;
- The new class is not designed to preserve or increase the voting power of an insider or significant shareholder.

## Preemptive Rights

Preemptive rights permit shareholders to share proportionately in any new issues of stock of the same class. These rights guarantee existing shareholders the first opportunity to purchase shares of new issues of stock in the same class as their own and in the same proportion. The absence of these rights could cause stockholders' interest in a company to be reduced by the sale of additional shares without their knowledge and at prices unfavorable to them. Preemptive rights, however, can make it difficult for corporations to issue large blocks of stock for general corporate purposes. Both corporations and shareholders benefit when corporations are able to arrange issues without preemptive rights that do not result in a substantial transfer of control.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Review on a case-by-case basis proposals to create or abolish preemptive rights. In evaluating proposals on preemptive rights, we look at the size of a company, the characteristics of its shareholder base and the liquidity of the stock.

## Debt Restructurings

Proposals to increase common and/or preferred shares and to issue shares as part of a debt-restructuring plan will be analyzed considering the following issues:

- Dilution: How much will the ownership interest of existing shareholders be reduced, and how extreme will dilution to any future earnings be?
- Change in Control: Will the transaction result in a change in control/management at the company? Are board and committee seats guaranteed? Do standstill provisions and voting agreements exist? Is veto power over certain corporate actions in place?
- Financial Issues: company's financial situation, degree of need for capital, use of proceeds, and effect of the financing on the company's cost of capital;
- Terms of the offer: discount/premium in purchase price to investor including any fairness opinion, termination penalties and exit strategy;
- Conflict of interest: arm's length transactions and managerial incentives;
- Management's efforts to pursue other alternatives.



#### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Review on a case-by-case basis proposals regarding debt restructurings.
- Vote for the debt restructuring if it is expected that the company will file for bankruptcy if the transaction is not approved.

## Share Repurchase Programs

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## Conversion of Securities

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding conversion of securities, taking into account 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.

## Recapitalization

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on recapitalizations (reclassifications of securities), taking into account:

- Whether the capital structure is simplified;
- Liquidity is enhanced;
- Fairness of conversion terms;
- Impact on voting power and dividends;
- Reasons for the reclassification;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Other alternatives considered.

## Tracking Stock

**Social Advisory Services 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;
- Alternatives such as spin-offs.

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

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## 6. Executive and Director Compensation

The global financial crisis resulted in significant erosion of shareholder value and highlighted the need for greater assurance that executive compensation is principally performance-based, fair, reasonable, and not designed in a manner that would incentivize excessive risk-taking by managements. The financial crisis raised questions about the role of pay incentives in influencing executive behavior and motivating inappropriate or excessive risk-taking that could threaten a corporation's long-term viability. The safety lapses that led to the disastrous explosions at BP's Deepwater Horizon oil rig and Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch mine, and the resulting unprecedented losses in shareholder value; a) underscore the importance of incorporating meaningful economic incentives around social and environmental considerations in compensation program design, and b) exemplify the costly liabilities of failing to do so.

Evolving disclosure requirements have opened a wider window into compensation practices and processes, giving shareholders more opportunity and responsibility to ensure that pay is designed to create and sustain value. Companies in the U.S. are now required to evaluate and discuss potential risks arising from misguided or misaligned compensation programs. The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act requires advisory shareholder votes on executive compensation (management "say on pay"), an advisory vote on the frequency of say on pay, as well as a shareholder advisory vote on golden parachute compensation. The advent of "say on pay" votes for shareholders in the U.S. has provided a new communication mechanism and impetus for constructive engagement between shareholders and managers/directors on pay issues.

The socially responsible investing community contends that corporations should be held accountable for their actions and decisions, including those around executive compensation. Social Advisory Services believes that executive pay programs should be fair, competitive, reasonable, and create appropriate incentives, and that pay for performance should be a central tenet in executive compensation philosophy. Most investors expect corporations to adhere to certain best practice pay considerations in designing and administering executive and director compensation programs, including:

- Appropriate pay-for-performance alignment with emphasis on long-term shareholder value: executive pay practices must be designed to attract, retain, and appropriately motivate the key employees who drive shareholder value creation over the long term. Evaluating appropriate alignment of pay incentives with shareholder value creation includes taking into consideration, among other factors, the link between pay and performance, the mix between fixed and variable pay, equity-based plan costs, and performance goals - including goals tied to social and environmental considerations.
- Avoiding arrangements that risk “pay for failure”: this includes assessing the appropriateness of long or indefinite contracts, excessive severance packages, guaranteed compensation, and practices or policies that fail to adequately mitigate against or address environmental, social and governance failures.
- Independent and effective compensation committees: 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) should be promoted.
- Clear and comprehensive compensation disclosures: shareholders expect companies to provide informative and timely disclosures that enable shareholders to evaluate executive pay practices fully and fairly.
- Avoiding inappropriate pay to non-executive directors: compensation to outside directors should not compromise their independence and ability to make appropriate judgments in overseeing managers’ pay and performance. At the market level, this may incorporate a variety of generally accepted best practices.

A non-exhaustive list of best pay practices includes:

- Employment contracts: Companies should enter into employment contracts under limited circumstances for a short time period (e.g., new executive hires for a three-year contract) for limited executives. The contracts should not have automatic renewal feature and should have a specified termination date.
- Severance agreements: Severance provisions should not be so appealing that it becomes an incentive for the executive to be terminated. Severance provisions should exclude excise tax gross-up. The severance formula should be reasonable and not overly generous to the executive (e.g., severance multiples of 1X, 2X, or 3X and use pro-rated target/average historical bonus and not maximum bonus). Failure to renew employment contract, termination under questionable events, or poor performance should not be considered as appropriate reasons for severance payments.
- Change-in-control payments: Change-in-control payments should only be made when there is a significant change in company ownership structure, and when there is a loss of employment or substantial change in job duties associated with the change in company ownership structure (“double-triggered”). Change-in-control provisions should exclude excise tax gross-up and eliminate the acceleration of vesting of equity awards upon a change in control unless provided under a double-trigger scenario. Similarly, change in control provisions in equity plans should be double-triggered. A change in control event should not result in an acceleration of vesting of all unvested stock options or removal of vesting/performance requirements on restricted stock/performance shares, unless there is a loss of employment or substantial change in job duties.
- Supplemental executive retirement plans (SERPs): SERPs should not include sweeteners that can increase the SERP value significantly or even exponentially, such as additional years of service credited for pension calculation, inclusion of variable pay (e.g. bonuses and equity awards) into the formula. Pension formula should not include extraordinary annual bonuses paid close to retirement years, and should be based on the average, not the maximum level of compensation earned.
- Deferred compensation: Above-market returns or guaranteed minimum returns should not be applied on deferred compensation.
- Disclosure practices: The Compensation Discussion & Analysis should be written in plain English, with as little “legalese” as possible and formatted using section headers, bulleted lists, tables, and charts where possible to ease reader comprehension. Ultimately, the document should provide detail and rationale regarding compensation, strategy, pay mix, goals/metrics, challenges, competition and pay for performance linkage, etc. in a narrative fashion.
- Responsible use of company stock: Companies should adopt policies that prohibit executives from speculating in company’s stock or using company stock in hedging activities, such as “cashless” collars, forward sales, equity swaps or other similar arrangements. Such behavior undermines the ultimate alignment with long-term shareholders’ interests. In addition, the policy should prohibit or discourage the

use of company stock as collateral for margin loans, to avoid any potential sudden stock sales (required upon margin calls), that could have a negative impact on the company's stock price.

- **Long-term focus:** Executive compensation programs should be designed to support companies' long-term strategic goals. A short-term focus on performance does not necessarily create sustainable shareholder value, since long-term goals may be sacrificed to achieve short-term expectations. Compensation programs embedding a long-term focus with respect to company goals better align with the long-term interests of shareholders. Granting stock options and restricted stock to executives that vest in five years do not necessarily provide a long-term focus, as executives can sell the company shares once they vest. However, requiring senior executives to hold company stock until they retire can encourage a long-term focus on company performance.

## Criteria for Evaluating Executive Pay

### Pay-for-Performance Evaluation

Social Advisory Services conducts a five-part pay analysis to evaluate the degree of alignment between the CEO's pay with the company's performance over a sustained period. From a shareholders' perspective, performance is predominantly gauged by the company's stock performance over time. Even when financial, non-financial or operational measures are utilized in incentive awards, the achievement related to these measures should ultimately translate into superior shareholder returns in the long-term. With respect to companies in the Russell 3000 or Russell 3000E Indices<sup>17</sup>, this analysis considers the following:

#### Pay-for-Performance Elements

- 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,<sup>18</sup> and the rankings of CEO total pay and company financial performance within a peer group, each measured over a three-year period
- Absolute Alignment: 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.<sup>19</sup>
- Equity Pay Mix: The ratio of the CEO's performance- vs. time-based equity awards.

#### Pay Equity (Quantum) Elements

- Multiple of Median: The multiple of the CEO's total pay relative to the peer group median in the most recent fiscal year.
- Internal Pay Disparity: The multiple of the CEO's total pay relative to other named executive officers (NEOs) – *i.e.*, an excessive differential between CEO total pay and that of the next highest-paid NEO as well as CEO total pay relative to the average NEO pay.

If the above pay-for-performance analysis demonstrates unsatisfactory long-term pay-for-performance alignment or, in the case of non-Russell 3000 index companies, misaligned pay and performance are otherwise suggested, the

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

<sup>18</sup> The revised peer group is generally comprised of 14-24 companies that are selected using market cap, revenue (or assets for certain financial firms), GICS industry group and company's selected peers' GICS industry group with size constraints, via a process designed to select peers that are closest 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.

<sup>19</sup> Only Russell 3000 Index companies are subject to the Absolute Alignment analysis.

following qualitative factors will be evaluated to determine how various pay elements may work to encourage or to undermine long-term value creation and alignment with shareholder interests:

- The ratio of performance-based compensation to overall compensation, including whether any relevant social or environmental factors are a component of performance-contingent pay elements;
- The presence of significant environmental, social or governance (ESG) controversies that have the potential to pose material risks to the company and its shareholders;
- Any downward discretion applied to executive compensation on the basis of a failure to achieve performance goals, including ESG performance objectives;
- The completeness of disclosure and rigor of performance goals;
- The company's peer group benchmarking practices;
- Actual results of financial/non-financial and operational metrics, such as growth in revenue, profit, cash flow, workplace safety, environmental performance, etc., both absolute and relative to peers;
- Special circumstances related to, for example, a new CEO in the prior FY or anomalous equity grant practices (e.g., bi-annual awards);
- Realizable pay compared to grant pay; and
- Any other factors deemed relevant.

## 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, including but not limited to a significant lack of disclosure;
- 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;
- Severance payments made when the termination is not clearly disclosed as involuntary (for example, a termination without cause or resignation for good reason);
- E&S Incentives: A lack of any LTI and STI performance metrics, incentives, and/or a lack of disclosure on LTI and STI performance metrics related to E&S criteria; and
- 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 the [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.

## Incentives that may Motivate Excessive Risk-Taking

Assess company policies and disclosure related to compensation that could incentivize excessive risk-taking, for example:

- Multi-year guaranteed bonuses;
- A single or common performance metric used for short- and long-term plans;
- Lucrative severance packages;
- High pay opportunities relative to industry peers;
- Disproportionate supplemental pensions;
- Mega annual equity grants that provide unlimited upside with no downside risk.

Factors that potentially mitigate the impact of risky incentives include rigorous claw-back provisions and robust stock ownership/holding guidelines.

## Options Backdating

The following factors should be examined on a case-by-case basis to allow for distinctions to be made between “sloppy” plan administration versus deliberate action or fraud, as well as those instances in which companies that subsequently took corrective action. Cases where companies have committed fraud are considered most egregious.

- 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;
- Adoption of a grant policy that prohibits backdating, and creates a fixed grant schedule or window period for equity grants in the future.

## Board 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.

## Advisory Votes on Executive Compensation – Management Say-on-Pay Proposals

The Dodd-Frank Act mandates advisory votes on executive compensation (Say on Pay or "SOP") for a proxy or consent or authorization for an annual or other meeting of the shareholders that includes required SEC compensation disclosures. This non-binding shareholder vote on compensation must be included in a proxy or consent or authorization at least once every three years.

In general, the SOP ballot item is the primary focus of voting on executive pay practices – dissatisfaction with compensation practices can be expressed by voting against the SOP proposal rather than voting against or withhold from the compensation committee. However, if there is no SOP on the ballot, then the negative vote will apply to members of the compensation committee. In addition, in egregious cases, or if the board fails to respond to concerns raised by a prior SOP proposal, then Social Advisory Services will recommend a vote against or withhold votes from compensation committee members (or, if the full board is deemed accountable, all directors). If the negative factors involve equity-based compensation, then a vote against an equity-based plan proposal presented for shareholder approval may be appropriate. In evaluating SOP proposals, Social Advisory Services will also assess to what degree social and environmental considerations are incorporated into compensation programs and executive pay decision-making – to the extent that proxy statement Compensation Discussion and Analysis (CD&A) disclosures permit.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Evaluate executive pay and practices, as well as certain aspects of outside director compensation on a case-by-case basis.

- Vote against management Say on Pay proposals if:
  - There is a misalignment between CEO pay and company performance ([pay-for-performance](#));
  - The company maintains [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, including option repricing or option backdating; or
  - The situation is egregious.
- Vote against an equity plan on the ballot if:
  - A pay for performance misalignment exists, and a significant portion of the CEO's misaligned pay is attributed to non-performance-based equity awards, taking into consideration:
    - 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 (NEO) level.



## Frequency of Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation – Management Say on Pay

The Dodd-Frank Act, in addition to requiring advisory votes on compensation (SOP), requires that each proxy for the first annual or other meeting of the shareholders (that includes required SEC compensation disclosures) occurring after Jan. 21, 2011, include an advisory voting item to determine whether, going forward, the "say on pay" vote by shareholders to approve compensation should occur every one, two, or three years.

Social Advisory Services will recommend a vote for annual advisory votes on compensation. The SOP is at its essence a communication vehicle, and communication is most useful when it is received in a consistent and timely manner. Social Advisory Services supports an annual SOP vote for many of the same reasons it supports annual director elections rather than a classified board structure: because this provides the highest level of accountability and direct communication by enabling the MSOP vote to correspond to the majority of the information presented in the accompanying proxy statement for the applicable shareholders' meeting. Having SOP votes every two or three years, covering all actions occurring between the votes, would make it difficult to create the meaningful and coherent communication that the votes are intended to provide. Under triennial elections, for example, a company would not know whether the shareholder vote references the compensation year being discussed or a previous year, making it more difficult to understand the implications of the vote.

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## Advisory Vote on Golden Parachutes in an Acquisition, Merger, Consolidation, or Proposed Sale

This is a proxy item regarding specific advisory votes on "golden parachute" arrangements for Named Executive Officers (NEOs) that is required under The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. Social Advisory Services places particular focus on severance packages that provide inappropriate windfalls and cover certain tax liabilities of executives.

**Social Advisory Services 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;
- Excessive cash severance (>3x base salary and bonus);
- Excise tax gross-ups triggered and payable (as opposed to a provision to provide excise tax gross-ups);
- 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"), Social Advisory Services will evaluate the "say on pay" proposal in accordance with these guidelines, which may give higher weight to that component of the overall evaluation.

## Equity-Based Incentive Plans

As executive pay levels continue to soar, non-salary compensation remains one of the most sensitive and visible corporate governance issues. The financial crisis raised questions about the role of pay incentives in influencing executive behavior, including their appetite for risk-taking. Although shareholders may have little say about how much the CEO is paid in salary and bonus, they do have a major voice in approving stock incentive plans.

Stock-based plans can transfer significant amounts of wealth from shareholders to executives and directors and are among the most economically significant issues that shareholders are entitled to vote on. Rightly, the cost of these plans must be in line with the anticipated benefits to shareholders. Clearly, reasonable limits must be set on dilution as well as administrative authority. In addition, shareholders must consider the necessity of the various pay programs and examine the appropriateness of award types. Consequently, the pros and cons of these proposals necessitate a case-by-case evaluation.

Factors that increase the cost (or have the potential to increase the cost) of plans to shareholders include: excessive dilution, options awarded at below-market discounts, permissive policies on pyramiding, restricted stock giveaways that reward tenure rather than results, sales of shares on concessionary terms, blank-check authority for administering committees, option repricing or option replacements, accelerated vesting of awards in the event of defined changes in corporate control, stand-alone stock appreciation rights, loans or other forms of assistance, or evidence of improvident award policies.

Positive plan features that can offset costly features include: plans with modest dilution potential (i.e. appreciably below double-digit levels), bars to pyramiding and related safeguards for investor interests. Also favorable are performance programs with a duration of two or more years, bonus schemes that pay off in non-dilutive, fully deductible cash, 401K and other thrift or profit sharing plans, and tax-favored employee stock purchase plans. In general, we believe that stock plans should afford incentives, not sure-fire, risk-free rewards.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on equity-based compensation plans<sup>20</sup> depending on a combination of certain plan features and equity grant practices, where positive factors may counterbalance negative factors, and vice versa, as evaluated using an "equity plan scorecard" (EPSC) approach with three pillars:

- **Plan Cost:** The total estimated cost of the company's equity plans relative to industry/market cap peers, measured by the company's estimated Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT) in relation to peers and considering both:
  - SVT based on new shares requested plus shares remaining for future grants, plus outstanding unvested/unexercised grants; and
  - SVT based only on new shares requested plus shares remaining for future grants.
- **Plan Features:**
  - Automatic single-triggered award vesting upon a change in control (CIC);
  - Discretionary vesting authority;
  - Liberal share recycling on various award types;

---

<sup>20</sup> 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.

- 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 most recent CEO 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 claw-back policy;
  - Whether the company has established 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 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 pay-for-performance disconnect;
- 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.

Each of these factors is described below.

Generally vote against equity plans if the cost is unreasonable. For non-employee director plans, vote for the plan if certain factors are met.

#### ***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. See discussion of specific types of awards.

Except 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.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> 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.
- The cancellation of underwater options in exchange for stock awards; or
- Cash buyouts of underwater options.

While the above cover most types of repricing, Social 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 Social Advisory Services), without prior shareholder approval, even if such repricings are allowed in their equity plan.

Vote against plans if the company has a history of repricing without shareholder approval, and the applicable listing standards would not preclude them from doing so.

## Pay-for-Performance Misalignment – Application to Equity Plans

If the equity plan on the ballot is a vehicle for [problematic pay practices](#), vote against the plan.

Social Advisory Services may recommend a vote against the equity plan if the plan is determined to be a vehicle for pay-for-performance misalignment. Considerations in voting against the equity plan may include, but are not limited to:

- Severity of the pay-for-performance misalignment;
- Whether problematic equity grant practices are driving the misalignment; and/or
- Whether equity plan awards have been heavily concentrated to the CEO and/or the other NEOs.

## Three-Year Value Adjusted Burn Rate

A "Value-Adjusted Burn Rate" is used for stock plan evaluations. Value-Adjusted Burn Rate benchmarks will be calculated as the greater of: (1) an industry-specific threshold based on three-year burn rates within the company's GICS group segmented by S&P 500, Russell 3000 index (less the S&P 500) and non-Russell 3000 index; and (2) a de minimis threshold established separately for each of the S&P 500, the Russell 3000 index less the S&P 500, and the non-Russell 3000 index. Year-over-year burn-rate benchmark changes will be limited to a predetermined range above or below the prior year's burn-rate benchmark.

The Value-Adjusted Burn Rate will be calculated as follows:

Value-Adjusted Burn Rate = ((# of options \* option's dollar value using a Black-Scholes model) + (# of full-value awards \* stock price)) / (Weighted average common shares \* stock price).

## Liberal Definition of Change-in-Control

Generally vote against equity plans if the plan provides for the acceleration of vesting of equity awards even though an actual change in control may not occur. Examples of such a definition could 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.

## Other Compensation Plans

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

Cash bonus plans can be an important part of an executive’s overall pay package, along with stock-based plans tied to long-term total shareholder returns. Over the long term, stock prices are an excellent indicator of management performance. However, other factors, such as economic conditions and investor reaction to the stock market in general and certain industries in particular, can greatly impact the company’s stock price. As a result, a cash bonus plan can effectively reward individual performance and the achievement of business unit objectives that are independent of short-term market share price fluctuations.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on amendments to cash and equity incentive plans.

Generally vote for proposals to amend executive cash, stock, or cash and stock incentive plans if the proposal:

- Addresses administrative features only; or
- Seeks approval for Section 162(m) purposes only, and the plan administering committee consists entirely of independent directors, per Social Advisory Services’ Categorization 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 directors, per Social Advisory Services’ Categorization 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 (including after the company’s IPO), whether or not additional shares are being requested, the recommendation will be based on the Equity Plan Scorecard evaluation as well as an analysis of the overall impact of any amendments.
- If there is no request for additional shares and the amendments 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.

In the first two case-by-case evaluation scenarios, the EPSC evaluation/score is the more heavily weighted consideration.

## Employee Stock Purchase Plans (ESPPs)

Employee stock purchase plans enable employees to become shareholders, which gives them a stake in the company's growth. However, purchase plans are beneficial only when they are well balanced and in the best interests of all shareholders. From a shareholder's perspective, plans with offering periods of 27 months or less are preferable. Plans with longer offering periods remove too much of the market risk and could give participants excessive discounts on their stock purchases that are not offered to other shareholders.

### Qualified Plans

Qualified employee stock purchase plans qualify for favorable tax treatment under Section 423 of the Internal Revenue Code. Such plans must be broad-based, permitting all full-time employees to participate. Some companies also permit part-time staff to participate. Qualified ESPPs must be expensed under SFAS 123 unless the plan meets the following conditions; a) purchase discount is 5 percent or below; b) all employees can participate in the program; and 3) no look-back feature in the program. Therefore, some companies offer nonqualified ESPPs.

**Social Advisory Services 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 ten 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.

### Non-Qualified Plans

For nonqualified ESPPs, companies provide a match to employees' contributions instead of a discount in stock price. Also, limits are placed on employees' contributions. Some companies provide a maximum dollar value for the year and others specify the limits in terms of a percent of base salary, excluding bonus or commissions. For plans that do not qualify under Section 423 of the Internal Revenue Code, a plan participant will not recognize income by participating in the plan, but will recognize ordinary compensation income for federal income tax purposes at the time of the purchase.

**Social Advisory Services 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 since 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 exceeds 25 percent of employee's contribution, evaluate the cost of the plan against its allowable cap.

## Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs)

An Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) is an employee benefit plan that makes the employees of a company also owners of stock in that company. The plans are designed to defer a portion of current employee income for retirement purposes.

The primary difference between ESOPs and other employee benefit plans is that ESOPs invest primarily in the securities of the employee's company. In addition, an ESOP must be created for the benefit of non-management level employees and administered by a trust that cannot discriminate in favor of highly paid personnel.

Academic research of the performance of ESOPs in closely held companies found that ESOPs appear to increase overall sales, employment, and sales per employee over what would have been expected absent an ESOP. Studies have also found that companies with an ESOP are also more likely to still be in business several years later, and are more likely to have other retirement oriented benefit plans than comparable non-ESOP companies.

**Social Advisory Services 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).

## Option Exchange Programs/Repricing Options

**Social Advisory Services 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?
- 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 should 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. Repricing after a recent decline in stock price triggers additional scrutiny and a potential vote against the proposal. At a minimum, the decline should not have happened within the past year. 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

### Social Advisory Services 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, Social Advisory Services will not make any adjustments to carve out the in-lieu-of cash compensation.

## Transfer Stock Option (TSO) Programs

### Social Advisory Services 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; and
- Option repricing policy.

Amendments to existing plans that allow for introduction of transferability of stock options should make clear that only options granted post-amendment shall be transferable.

## 401(k) Employee Benefit Plans

The 401(k) plan is one of the most popular employee benefit plans among U.S. companies. A 401(k) plan is any qualified plan under Section 401(k) of the Internal Revenue Code that contains a cash or deferred arrangement. In its simplest form, an employee can elect to have a portion of his salary invested in a 401(k) plan before any income taxes are assessed. The money can only be withdrawn before retirement under penalty. However, because the money contributed to the plan is withdrawn before taxes (reducing the employee's income tax), a properly planned 401(k) plan will enable an employee to make larger contributions to a 401(k) plan than to a savings plan, and still take the same amount home.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for proposals to implement a 401(k) savings plan for employees.

## Severance Agreements for Executives/Golden Parachutes

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote on a case-by-case basis on proposals to ratify or cancel golden parachutes. An acceptable parachute should include, but is not limited to, the following:

- The triggering mechanism should be beyond the control of management;
- The amount should not exceed three times base amount (defined as the average annual taxable W-2 compensation during the five years prior to the year in which the change of control occurs;
- Change-in-control payments should be double-triggered, i.e., (1) after a change in control has taken place, and (2) termination of the executive as a result of the change in control. Change in control is defined as a change in the company ownership structure.

## Director Compensation

The board's legal charge of fulfilling its fiduciary obligations of loyalty and care is put to the ultimate test through the task of the board setting its own compensation. Directors themselves oversee the process for evaluating board performance and establishing pay packages for board members.

Shareholders provide limited oversight of directors by electing individuals who are primarily selected by the board, or a board nominating committee, and by voting on stock-based plans for directors designed by the board compensation committee. Additionally, shareholders may submit and vote on their own resolutions seeking to limit or restructure director pay. While the cost of compensating non-employee directors is small in absolute terms, compared to the cost of compensating executives, it is still a critical aspect of a company's overall corporate governance structure.

Overall, director pay levels are rising in part because of the new forms of pay in use at many companies, as well as because of the increased responsibilities arising from the 2002 Sarbanes-Oxley Act requirements. In addition to an annual retainer fee, many companies also pay fees for attending board and committee meetings, fees for chairing a committee, or a retainer fee for chairing a committee.

Director compensation packages should be designed to provide value to directors for their contribution. Given that many directors are high-level executives whose personal income levels are generally high, cash compensation may hold little appeal. Stock-based incentives on the other hand reinforce the directors' role of protecting and enhancing shareholder value. The stock-based component of director compensation should be large enough to ensure that when faced with a situation in which the interests of shareholders and management differ, the board will have a financial incentive to think as a shareholder. Additionally, many companies have instituted equity ownership programs for directors. Social Advisory Services recommends that directors receive stock grants equal to three times of their annual retainer, as it is a reasonable starting point for companies of all sizes and industries.

A vesting schedule for director grants helps directors to meet the stock ownership guidelines and maintains their long-term interests in the firm.

Director compensation packages should also be designed to attract and retain competent directors who are willing to risk becoming a defendant in a lawsuit and suffer potentially adverse publicity if the company runs into financial difficulties or is mismanaged.

## Shareholder Ratification of Director Pay Programs

**Social Advisory Services 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

Stock-based plans may take on a variety of forms including: grants of stock or options, including: discretionary grants, formula based grants, and one-time awards; stock-based awards in lieu of all or some portion of the cash retainer and/or other fees; and deferred stock plans allowing payment of retainer and/or meeting fees to be taken in stock, the payment of which is postponed to some future time, typically retirement or termination of directorship.

**Social Advisory Services 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 that set aside a relatively small number of shares will exceed the plan cost or burn rate benchmark when combined with employee or executive stock compensation plans. In such cases, vote for the plan if all of the following qualitative factors in the board's compensation are met and disclosed in the proxy statement:

- 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 requirement;
- Equity award vesting schedules;
- The mix of cash and equity-based compensation;

- Meaningful limits on director compensation;
- The availability of retirement benefits or perquisites;
- The quality of disclosure surrounding director compensation.

## Outside Director Stock Awards/Options in Lieu of Cash

These proposals seek to pay outside directors a portion of their compensation in stock rather than cash. By doing this, a director's interest may be more closely aligned with those of shareholders.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for proposals that seek to pay outside directors a portion of their compensation in stock rather than cash.

## Director Retirement Plans

**Social Advisory Services 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

### Increase Disclosure of Executive Compensation

The SEC requires that companies disclose, in their proxy statements, the salaries of the top five corporate executives (who make at least \$100,000 a year). Companies also disclose their compensation practices and details of their stock-based compensation plans. While this level of disclosure is helpful, it does not always provide a comprehensive picture of the company's compensation practices. For shareholders to make informed decisions on compensation levels, they need to have clear, concise information at their disposal. Increased disclosure will help ensure that management: (1) has legitimate reasons for setting specific pay levels; and (2) is held accountable for its actions.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals seeking increased disclosure on executive compensation issues including the preparation of a formal report on executive compensation practices and policies.

### Limit Executive Compensation

Proposals that seek to limit executive or director compensation usually focus on the absolute dollar figure of the compensation or focus on the ratio of compensation between the executives and the average worker of a specific company. Proponents argue that the exponential growth of executive salaries is not in the best interests of shareholders, especially when that pay is exorbitant when compared to the compensation of other workers.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote for proposals to prepare reports seeking to compare the wages of a company's lowest paid worker to the highest paid workers.
- Vote case-by-case on proposals that seek to establish a fixed ratio between the company's lowest paid workers and the highest paid workers.

## Stock Ownership Requirements

Corporate directors should own some amount of stock of the companies on which they serve as board members. Stock ownership is a simple method to align the interests of directors with company shareholders. Nevertheless, many highly qualified individuals such as academics and clergy who can offer valuable perspectives in boardrooms may be unable to purchase individual shares of stock. In such a circumstance, the preferred solution is to look at the board nominees individually and take stock ownership into consideration when voting on the merits of each candidate.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** 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.

## Prohibit/Require Shareholder Approval for Option Repricing

Repricing involves the reduction of the original exercise price of a stock option after the fall in share price. Social Advisory Services does not support repricing since it undermines the incentive purpose of the plan. The use of options as an incentive means that employees must bear the same risks as shareholders in holding these options. Shareholder resolutions calling on companies to abandon the practice of repricing or to submit repricings to a shareholder vote will be supported.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking to limit repricing.
- Vote for shareholder proposals asking the company to have option repricings submitted for shareholder ratification.

## Severance Agreements/Golden Parachutes

Golden parachutes are designed to protect the employees of a corporation in the event of a change in control. With Golden Parachutes senior level management employees receive a payout during a change in control at usually two to three times base salary.

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## Cash Balance Plans

A cash balance plan is a defined benefit plan that treats an earned retirement benefit as if it was a credit from a defined contribution plan, but which provides a stated benefit at the end of its term. Because employer

contributions to these plans are credited evenly over the life of a plan, and not based on a seniority formula they may reduce payouts to long-term employees who are currently vested in plans.

Cash-balance pension conversions have undergone congressional and federal agency scrutiny following high-profile EEOC complaints on age discrimination and employee anger at companies like IBM. While significant change is unlikely in the short-term, business interests were concerned enough that the National Association of Manufacturers and other business lobbies formed a Capitol Hill coalition to preserve the essential features of the plans and to overturn an IRS ruling. Driving the push behind conversions from traditional pension plans to cash-balance plans are the substantial savings that companies generate in the process. Critics point out that these savings are gained at the expense of the most senior employees. Resolutions call on corporate boards to establish a committee of outside directors to prepare a report to shareholders on the potential impact of pension-related proposals now being considered by national policymakers in reaction to the controversy spawned by the plans.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote for shareholder proposals calling for non-discrimination in retirement benefits.
- Vote for shareholder proposals asking a company to give employees the option of electing to participate in either a cash balance plan or in a defined benefit plan.

## Performance-Based Equity Awards

Social Advisory Services supports compensating executives at a reasonable rate and believes that executive compensation should be strongly correlated to performance. Social Advisory Services supports equity awards that provide challenging performance objectives and serve to motivate executives to superior performance and as performance-contingent stock options as a significant component of compensation.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposal 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

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Generally vote for shareholder proposals based on a case-by-case analysis that requests the board establish a pay-for-superior performance standard in the company's executive compensation plan for senior executives. The proposal has the following principles:

- Sets compensation targets for the Plan's annual and long-term incentive pay components at or below the peer group median;
- Delivers a majority of the Plan's target long-term compensation through performance-vested, not simply time-vested, equity awards;
- Provides 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;
- Establishes performance targets for each plan financial metric relative to the performance of the company's peer companies;
- Limits 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?

## Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation (Say-on-Pay) Shareholder Proposals

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Generally, vote for shareholder proposals that call for non-binding shareholder ratification of the compensation of the Named Executive Officers and the accompanying narrative disclosure of material factors provided to understand the Summary Compensation Table.

## Termination of Employment Prior to Severance Payment and Eliminating Accelerated Vesting of Unvested Equity

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** 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).

Vote on a case-by-case on shareholder proposals seeking a policy requiring termination of employment prior to severance payment, and eliminating accelerated vesting of unvested equity. The following factors will be taken into regarding this policy:

- 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;
- Current employment agreements, including potential problematic pay practices such as gross-ups embedded in those agreements.

## Tax Gross-up Proposals

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## Compensation Consultants - Disclosure of Board or Company's Utilization

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## Golden Coffins/Executive Death Benefits

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## Recoup Bonuses

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote on a case-by-case on proposals to recoup unearned incentive bonuses or other incentive payments made to senior executives if it is later determined that the figures upon which incentive compensation is earned later turn out to have been in error. This is line with the clawback provision in the Troubled Asset Relief Program. Many companies have adopted policies that permit recoupment in cases where fraud, misconduct, or negligence significantly contributed to a restatement of financial results that led to the awarding of unearned incentive compensation. The following will be taken into consideration:

- If the company has adopted a formal recoupment bonus policy;
- If the company has chronic restatement history or material financial problems;
- If the company's policy substantially addresses the concerns raised by the proponent.

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

**Social Advisory Services 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

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## Hold Equity Past Retirement or for a Significant Period of Time

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals asking companies to adopt policies requiring senior executive officers to retain a portion of net shares acquired through compensation plans. The following factors will be taken into account:

- The percentage/ratio of net shares required to be retained;
- The time period required to retain the shares;
- Whether the company has equity retention, holding period, and/or stock ownership requirements in place and the robustness of such requirements;
- Whether the company has any other policies aimed at mitigating risk taking by executives;
- Executives' actual stock ownership and the degree to which it meets or exceeds the proponent's suggested holding period/retention ratio or the company's existing requirements; and
- Problematic pay practices, current and past, which may demonstrate a short-term versus long-term focus.

## Non-Deductible Compensation

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals seeking disclosure of the extent to which the company paid non-deductible compensation to senior executives due to Internal Revenue Code Section 162(m), while considering the company's existing disclosure practices.

## Pre-Arranged Trading Plans (10b5-1 Plans)

**Social Advisory Services 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.

# 7. Mergers and Corporate Restructurings

A merger occurs when one corporation is absorbed into another and ceases to exist. The surviving company gains all the rights, privileges, powers, duties, obligations and liabilities of the merged corporation. The shareholders of the absorbed company receive stock or securities of the surviving company or other consideration as provided by the plan of merger. Mergers, consolidations, share exchanges, and sale of assets are friendly in nature, which is to say that both sides have agreed to the combination or acquisition of assets.

Shareholder approval for an acquiring company is generally not required under state law or stock exchange regulations unless the acquisition is in the form of a stock transaction which would result in the issue of 20 percent or more of the acquirer's outstanding shares or voting power, or unless the two entities involved require that shareholders approve the deal. Under most state laws, however, a target company must submit merger agreements to a shareholder vote. Shareholder approval is required in the formation of a consolidated corporation.

## Mergers and Acquisitions

M&A analyses are inherently a balance of competing factors. Bright line rules are difficult if not impossible to apply to a world where every deal is different. Ultimately, the question for shareholders (both of the acquirer and the target) is the following: Is the valuation fair? Shareholders of the acquirer may be concerned that the deal values the target too highly. Shareholders of the target may be concerned that the deal undervalues their interests.

Vote recommendation will be based on primarily an analysis of shareholder value, which itself can be affected by ancillary factors such as the negotiation process. The importance of other factors, including corporate governance and social and environmental considerations however, should not fail to be recognized.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Votes on mergers and acquisitions are considered on a case-by-case basis. A review and evaluation of the merits and drawbacks of the proposed transaction is conducted, 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?
- Conflicts of interest: Are insiders benefiting from the transaction disproportionately and inappropriately as compared to non-insider shareholders?
- Governance: Will the combined company have a better or worse governance profile than the current governance profiles of the respective parties to the transaction?
- Stakeholder impact: Impact on community stakeholders and workforce including impact on stakeholders, such as job loss, community lending, equal opportunity, impact on environment etc.

## Corporate Reorganization/Restructuring Plans (Bankruptcy)

The recent financial crisis has placed Chapter 11 bankruptcy reorganizations as a potential alternative for distressed companies. While the number of bankruptcies has risen over the past year as evidenced by many firms, including General Motors and Lehman Brothers, the prevalence of these reorganizations can vary year over year due to, among other things, market conditions and a company's ability to sustain its operations. Additionally, the amount of time that lapses between a particular company's entrance into Chapter 11 and its submission of a plan of reorganization varies significantly depending on the complexity, timing, and jurisdiction of the particular case. These plans are often put to a vote of shareholders (in addition to other interested parties), as required by the Bankruptcy Code.

**Social Advisory Services 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;
- Governance of the reorganized company.

## Special Purpose Acquisition Corporations (SPACs)

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on SPAC mergers and acquisitions taking into account the following:

- **Valuation:** Is the value being paid by the SPAC reasonable? SPACs generally lack an independent fairness opinion and the financials on the target may be limited. Compare the conversion price with the intrinsic value of the target company provided in the fairness opinion. Also, evaluate the proportionate value of the combined entity attributable to the SPAC IPO shareholders versus the pre-merger value of SPAC. Additionally, a private company discount may be applied to the target, if it is a private entity.
- **Market reaction:** How has the market responded to the proposed deal? A negative market reaction may be a cause for concern. Market reaction may be addressed by analyzing the one-day impact on the unaffected stock price.
- **Deal timing:** A main driver for most transactions is that the SPAC charter typically requires the deal to be complete within 18 to 24 months, or the SPAC is to be liquidated. Evaluate the valuation, market reaction, and potential conflicts of interest for deals that are announced close to the liquidation date.
- **Negotiations and process:** What was the process undertaken to identify potential target companies within specified industry or location specified in charter? Consider the background of the sponsors.
- **Conflicts of interest:** How are sponsors benefiting from the transaction compared to IPO shareholders? Potential conflicts could arise if a fairness opinion is issued by the insiders to qualify the deal rather than a third party or if management is encouraged to pay a higher price for the target because of an 80 percent rule (the charter requires that the fair market value of the target is at least equal to 80 percent of net assets of the SPAC). Also, there may be sense of urgency by the management team of the SPAC to close the deal since its charter typically requires a transaction to be completed within the 18-24 month timeframe.
- **Voting agreements:** Are the sponsors entering into any voting agreements/tender offers with shareholders who are likely to vote against the proposed merger or exercise conversion rights?
- **Governance:** What is the impact of having the SPAC CEO or founder on key committees following the proposed merger?
- **Stakeholder Impact:** Impact on community stakeholders and workforce including impact on stakeholders, such as job loss, community lending, equal opportunity, impact on environment etc.

## Special Purpose Acquisition Corporations (SPACs) – Proposals for Extensions

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Generally support requests to extend the termination date by up to one year from the SPAC's original termination date (inclusive of any built-in extension options, and accounting for prior extension requests).

Other factors that may be considered include: any added incentives, business combination status, other amendment terms, and, if applicable, use of money in the trust fund to pay excise taxes on redeemed shares.

## Spin-offs

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Votes on spin-offs should be considered on a case-by-case basis depending on the tax and regulatory advantages, planned use of 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.

## Asset Purchases

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Votes on asset purchase proposals should be made on a case-by-case after considering the 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

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Votes on asset sales should be made on a case-by-case basis after considering the impact on the balance sheet/working capital, value received for the asset, potential elimination of diseconomies, anticipated financial and operating benefits, anticipated use of funds, fairness opinion, how the deal was negotiated, and conflicts of interest.

## Liquidations

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Votes on liquidations should be made on a case-by-case basis after reviewing 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.

## Joint Ventures

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to form joint ventures, taking into account percentage of assets/business contributed, percentage ownership, financial and strategic benefits, governance structure, conflicts of interest, other alternatives and non-completion risk.

## Appraisal Rights

Rights of appraisal provide shareholders who do not approve of the terms of certain corporate transactions the right to demand a judicial review in order to determine the fair value for their shares. The right of appraisal generally applies to mergers, sales of essentially all assets of the corporation, and charter amendments that may have a materially adverse effect on the rights of dissenting shareholders.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for proposals to restore, or provide shareholders with, rights of appraisal.

## Going Private/Dark Transactions (Leveraged buyouts and Minority Squeeze-outs)

**Social Advisory Services 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?

## Private Placements/Warrants/Convertible Debentures

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding private placements 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.
- 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 issues.
  - When evaluating the magnitude of a private placement discount or premium, Social Advisory Services will consider whether it is affected by liquidity, due diligence, control and monitoring issues, capital scarcity, information asymmetry and anticipation of future performance.
- Financial issues include but are not limited to examining the following: a) company's financial situation; b) degree of need for capital; c) use of proceeds; d) effect of the financing on the company's cost of capital; e) current and proposed cash burn rate; and f) 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 including: a) Change in management; b) change in control; c) guaranteed board and committee seats; d) standstill provisions; e) voting agreements; f) veto power over certain corporate actions.
- 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 if it is expected that the company will file for bankruptcy if the transaction is not approved.

## Formation of Holding Company

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding the formation of a holding company, taking into consideration: a) the reasons for the change; b) any financial or tax benefits; c) regulatory benefits; d) increases in capital structure; and e) changes to the articles of incorporation or bylaws of the company.

- Vote against the formation of a holding company, absent compelling financial reasons to support the transaction, if the transaction would include either: a) increases in common or preferred stock in excess of the allowable maximum; or b) adverse changes in shareholder rights.

## Value Maximization Shareholder Proposals

**Social Advisory Services 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;
- Strategic plan in place for improving value;
- Likelihood of receiving reasonable value in a sale or dissolution;
- Whether company is actively exploring its strategic options, including retaining a financial advisor.

## 8. Social and Environmental Proposals

Socially responsible shareholder resolutions are receiving a great deal more attention from institutional shareholders today than they have in the past. In addition to the moral and ethical considerations intrinsic to many of these proposals, there is a growing recognition of their potential impact on the economic performance of the company. Among the reasons for this change are:

- The number and variety of shareholder resolutions on social and environmental issues has increased;
- Many of the sponsors and supporters of these resolutions are large institutional shareholders with significant holdings, and therefore, greater direct influence on the outcomes;
- The proposals are more sophisticated – better written, more focused, and more sensitive to the feasibility of implementation;
- Investors now understand that a company's response to social and environmental issues can have serious economic consequences for the company and its shareholders.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Generally vote for social and environmental shareholder proposals that promote good corporate citizens while enhancing long-term shareholder and stakeholder value. Vote for disclosure reports that seek additional information particularly when it appears companies have not adequately addressed shareholders' social, workforce, and environmental concerns. In determining vote recommendations on shareholder social, workforce, and environmental proposals, Social Advisory Services will 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;
- Whether the company's analysis and voting recommendation to shareholders is persuasive;
- The degree to which the company's stated position on the issues could affect its reputation or sales, or leave it vulnerable to boycott or selective purchasing;
- Whether the subject of the proposal is best left to the discretion of the board;
- Whether the issues presented in the proposal are best dealt with through legislation, government regulation, or company-specific action;
- The company's approach compared with its peers or any industry standard practices for addressing the issue(s) raised by the proposal;



- Whether the company has already responded in an appropriate or sufficient manner to the issue(s) raised in the proposal;
- Whether there are significant controversies, fines, penalties, or litigation associated with the company's environmental or social practices;
- If the proposal requests increased disclosure or greater transparency, whether sufficient information is publicly available to shareholders and whether it would be unduly burdensome for the company to compile and avail the requested information to shareholders in a more comprehensive or amalgamated fashion;
- Whether implementation of the proposal would achieve the objectives sought in the proposal.

In general, Social Advisory Services supports proposals that request the company to furnish information helpful to shareholders in evaluating the company's operations. In order to be able to intelligently monitor their investments shareholders often need information best provided by the company in which they have invested. Requests to report such information will merit support. Requests to establish special committees of the board to address broad corporate policy and provide forums for ongoing dialogue on issues including, but not limited to shareholder relations, the environment, human rights, occupational health and safety, and executive compensation, will generally be supported, particularly when they appear to offer a potentially effective method for enhancing shareholder value. We will closely evaluate proposals that ask the company to cease certain actions that the proponent believes are harmful to society or some segment of society with special attention to the company's legal and ethical obligations, its ability to remain profitable, and potential negative publicity if the company fails to honor the request. Social Advisory Services supports shareholder proposals that improve the company's public image, and reduce exposure to liabilities.

## Diversity and Equality

### Diversity and Equality

Significant progress has been made in recent years in the advancement of gender and racial diversity in the workplace and the establishment of greater protections against discriminatory practices in the workplace. In the U.S, there are many civil rights laws that are enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on race religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, and nationality. However, discrimination on the basis of federally protected characteristics continues. The SEC's revised disclosure rules now require information on how boards factor diversity into the director nomination process, as well as disclosure on how the board assesses the effectiveness of its diversity policy.

Shareholder proposals on diversity may target a company's board nomination procedures or seek greater disclosure on a company's programs and procedures on increasing the diversity of its workforce, and make reference to one or more of the following points:

- Violations of workplace anti-discrimination laws lead to expensive litigation and damaged corporate reputations that are not in the best interests of shareholders;
- Employers already prepare employee diversity reports for the EEOC, so preparing a similar report to shareholders can be done at minimal cost;
- The presence of gender and ethnic diversity in workforce and customer pools gives companies with diversified boards a practical advantage over their competitors as a result of their unique perspectives;
- Efforts to increase diversity on corporate boards can be made at reasonable costs;
- Reports can be prepared "at reasonable expense" describing efforts to encourage diversified representation on their boards;

## Add Women and Minorities to the Board

Board diversification proposals ask companies to put systems in place to increase the representation of gender, ethnic, and racial diversity as well as union members or other underrepresented minority groups on boards of directors.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals that ask the company to take steps to increase diversity to the board.
- Vote for shareholder proposals asking for reports on board diversity.
- Vote for shareholder proposals asking companies to adopt nomination charters or amend existing charters to include reasonable language addressing diversity.

## Racial Equity and/or Civil Rights Audits

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## Report on the Distribution of Stock Options by Gender and Race

Companies have received requests from shareholders to prepare reports documenting the distribution of the stock options and restricted stock awards by race and gender of the recipient. Proponents of these proposals argue that, in the future, there will be a shift toward basing racial and gender discrimination suits on the distribution of corporate wealth through stock options. The appearance of these proposals is also in response to the nationwide wage gap and under representation of minorities and women at the highest levels of compensation.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals asking companies to report on the distribution of stock options by race and gender of the recipient.

## Prepare Report/Promote EEOC-Related Activities

Filers of proposals on this issue generally ask a company to make available, at a reasonable cost and omitting proprietary information, data the company includes in its annual report to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) outlining the make-up of its workforce by race, gender and position. Shareholders also ask companies to report on any efforts they are making to advance the representation of underrepresented gender, ethnic, and racial identities in their workforce. The costs of violating federal laws that prohibit discrimination by corporations are high and can affect corporate earnings. The Equal Opportunities Employment Commission does not release the companies' filings to the public, unless it is involved in litigation and this information is difficult to obtain from other sources. Companies need to be sensitive to diverse workforce employment issues as new generations of workers become increasingly diverse. This information can be provided with little cost to the company and does not create an unreasonable burden on management.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals that ask the company to report on its diversity and/or affirmative action programs.
- Vote for shareholder proposals calling for legal and regulatory compliance and public reporting related to nondiscrimination, affirmative action, workplace health and safety, and labor policies and practices that effect long-term corporate performance.

- Vote for shareholder proposals requesting nondiscrimination in salary, wages and all benefits.
- Vote for shareholder proposals calling for action on equal employment opportunity and antidiscrimination.

## Report on Progress Towards Glass Ceiling Commission Recommendations

In November 1995, the Glass Ceiling Commission (Commission), a bipartisan panel of leaders from business and government, issued a report describing “an unseen yet unbreachable barrier that keeps women and minorities from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder.” The Commission recommended that companies take practical steps to rectify this disparity, such as including diversity goals in business plans, committing to affirmative action for qualified employees and initiating family-friendly labor policies. Shareholders have submitted proposals asking companies to report on progress made toward the Commission’s recommendations.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals that ask the company to report on its progress against the Glass Ceiling Commission’s recommendations.
- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking to eliminate the “glass ceiling” for women and minority employees.

## Prohibit Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity

Federal law bans workplace discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ) employees, and some states have additionally enacted workplace protections for these employees. Although an increasing number of US companies have explicitly banned discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity in their equal employment opportunity (EEO) statements, many still do not. Shareholder proponents and other activist groups concerned with LGBTQ rights, such as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the Pride Foundation, have targeted U.S. companies that do not specifically restrict discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in their EEO statements. Shareholder proposals on this topic ask companies to change the language of their EEO statements in order to put in place anti-discrimination protection for their LGBTQ employees. In addition, proposals may seek disclosure on a company’s general initiatives to create a workplace free of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, including reference to such items as support of LGBTQ employee groups, diversity training that addresses sexual orientation, and non-medical benefits to domestic partners of LGBTQ employees.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals to include language in EEO statements specifically barring discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking reports on a company’s initiatives to create a workplace free of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Vote against shareholder proposals that seek to eliminate protection already afforded to LGBTQ employees.

## Report on/Eliminate Use of Racial Stereotypes in Advertising

Many companies continue to use racial stereotypes or images perceived as racially insensitive in their advertising campaigns. Filers of shareholder proposals on this topic often request companies to give more careful consideration to the symbols and images that are used to promote the company.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals seeking more careful consideration of using racial stereotypes in advertising campaigns, including preparation of a report on this issue.

## Gender, Race, or Ethnicity Pay Gap

Over the past several years, shareholders have filed resolutions requesting that companies report whether a gender, race, or ethnicity pay gap exists, and if so, what measures are being taken to eliminate the gap.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for requests for reports on a company's pay data by gender, race, or ethnicity, or a report on a company's policies and goals to reduce any gender, race, or ethnicity pay gap.

## Labor and Human Rights

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 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 other forms of modern slavery. These companies are asked to adopt formal vendor standards that, among other things, include some sort of monitoring 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. Deadly accidents at factories, most notably in Bangladesh and Pakistan, have continued to intensify these concerns. Many investors believe that companies would benefit from adopting a human rights policy, based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Labour Organization's Core Labor Standards. Efforts that seek greater disclosure on a company's global labor practices, including its supply chain, 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.

Social Advisory Services 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 labor 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.

## Codes of Conduct and Vendor Standards

Shareholders have submitted proposals that pertain to the adoption of codes of conduct or provision, greater disclosure on a company's international workplace standards, or that request human rights risk assessment. Companies have been asked to adopt a number of different types of codes, including a workplace code of conduct, standards for international business operations, human rights standards, International Labour Organization (ILO) standards and the SA 8000 principles. The ILO is an independent agency of the United Nations which consists of 187 member nations represented by workers, employers, and governments. The ILO's general mandate is to promote a decent workplace for all individuals. The ILO sets international labor standards in the form of its conventions and then monitors compliance with the standards. The seven conventions of the ILO fall under four broad categories: Right to organize and bargain collectively, Nondiscrimination in employment, Abolition of forced labor, and End of child labor. Each of the 187 member-nations of the ILO is bound to respect and promote these rights to the best of their abilities. SA 8000 is a set of labor standards, based on the principles of the ILO conventions and other human rights conventions, and covers eight workplace conditions, including: child labor, forced labor, health and safety, freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, discrimination,

disciplinary practices, working hours and compensation. Companies have also turned to the United Nations "Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights," - a set of guidelines that create a framework for states to protect human rights, corporations to respect human rights, and rights-holders to access remediation.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- 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 human rights due diligence practices.
- Vote for shareholder proposals that call for the adoption of principles or codes of conduct relating to company investments in countries with patterns of human rights abuses.
- 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" by the company's foreign suppliers and licensees, requiring that they satisfy all applicable standards and laws protecting employees' wages, benefits, working conditions, freedom of association, and other rights.
- 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.
- 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 in the U.S. using forced labor, child labor, or that fail to comply with applicable laws protecting employee's wages and working conditions.

## Adopt/Report on 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.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals to report on or implement the MacBride Principles.

## Community Impact Assessment/Indigenous Peoples' Rights

A number of U.S. public companies have found their operations or expansion plans in conflict with local indigenous groups. In order to improve their standing with indigenous groups and decrease any negative publicity companies may face, some concerned shareholders have sought reports requesting that companies review their obligations, actions and presence on these groups. Some companies have made progress in working with indigenous groups.

However, shareholders who are concerned with the negative impact that the company's operations may have on the indigenous people's land and community, have sought reports detailing the impact of the company's actions and presence on these groups.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals asking to prepare reports on a company's environmental and health impact on communities.

## Report on Risks of Outsourcing

Consumer interest in keeping costs low through comparison shopping, coupled with breakthroughs in productivity have prompted companies to look for methods of increasing profit margins while keeping prices competitive. Through a practice known as off-shoring, the outsourcing or moving of manufacturing and service operations to foreign markets with lower labor costs, companies have found one method where the perceived savings potential is quite substantial. Shareholder opponents of outsourcing argue that there may be long-term consequences to offshore outsourcing that outweigh short-term benefits such as backlash from a public already sensitive to off-shoring, security risks from information technology development overseas, and diminished employee morale. Shareholder proposals addressing outsourcing ask that companies prepare a report to shareholders evaluating the risk to the company's brand name and reputation in the U.S. from outsourcing and off-shoring of manufacturing and service work to other countries.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholders proposals asking companies to report on the risks associated with outsourcing or off-shoring.

## Report on the Impact of Health Pandemics on Company Operations

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, among other historic pandemics, the distribution of treatments vastly differed in effectiveness between regions. With limited access to adequate treatments, the increasing death toll is expected to have profound social, political, and economic impact globally, including on the companies or industries with operations in affected areas. In the past, shareholder proposals asked companies to develop policies to provide affordable drugs in historically disadvantaged regions. However, in recent years, shareholders have changed their tactic, asking instead for reports on the impact of these pandemics on company operations, including both pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical companies operating in high-risk areas. This change is consistent with the general shift in shareholder proposals towards risk assessment and mitigation.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals asking for companies to report on the impact of pandemics, such as COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis, on their business strategies.

## Mandatory Arbitration

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Generally vote for requests for a report on a company's use of mandatory arbitration on employment-related claims.

## Sexual Harassment

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Generally vote for 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.



## Operations in High-Risk Markets

In recent years, shareholder advocates and human rights organizations have highlighted concerns associated with companies operating in regions that are politically unstable, including state sponsors of terror. The U.S. government has active trade sanction regimes in place against specific companies, or persons, including Russia, China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan, and Syria, among others. These sanctions are enforced by the Office of Foreign Assets Control, which is part of the U.S. Department of the Treasury, as well as U.S. Customs and Border Patrol for sanctioned goods. However, these countries do not comprise an exhaustive list of countries considered to be high-risk markets.

Shareholder proponents have filed resolutions addressing a variety of concerns around how investments and operations in high-risk regions may support, or be perceived to support, potentially oppressive governments. Proponents contend that operations in these countries may lead to potential reputational, regulatory, and/or supply chain risks as a result of operational disruptions. Concerned shareholders have requested investment withdrawals or cessation of operations in high-risk markets as well as reports on operations in high-risk markets. Such reports may seek additional disclosure from companies on criteria employed for investing in, continuing to operate in, and withdrawing from specific countries.

Depending on the country's human rights record, investors have also asked companies to refrain from commencing new projects in the country of concern until improvements are made. In addition, investors have sought greater disclosure on the nature of a company's involvement in the country and on the impact of their involvement or operations.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for requests for a review of and a report outlining the company's potential financial and reputation risks associated with operations in "high-risk" markets, such as a terrorism-sponsoring state or otherwise, 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;
- Whether the company has been recently involved in significant controversies or violations in "high-risk" markets.

## Reports on Operations in Burma/Myanmar

Since the early 1960s, Burma (also known as Myanmar) has been ruled by a military dictatorship that has been condemned for human rights abuses, including slave labor, torture, rape and murder. Many companies have pulled out of Burma over the past decade given the controversy surrounding involvement in the country. Oil companies continue to be the largest investors in Burma and therefore are the usual targets of shareholder proposals on this topic. However, proposals have also been filed at other companies, including financial companies, for their involvement in the country.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote for shareholder proposals to adopt labor standards in connection with involvement in Burma.
- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking reports on Burmese operations and reports on costs of continued involvement in the country.
- Vote shareholder proposals to pull out of Burma on a case-by-case basis.



## Reports on Operations in China

Documented human rights abuses in China continue to raise concerns among investors, specifically with respect to alleged use of forced and child labor in supply chains across industries such as apparel, solar energy, technology manufacturing, and more. Reports have identified U.S. companies with direct or indirect ties to companies controlled by the Chinese military, the People's Liberation Army (PLA). In addition, a number of Chinese companies have been connected to the use of state-sponsored labor of Uyghur and other Muslim minority groups. The Chinese government has explained these forced labor transfer programs as policies to combat terrorism, religious extremism, and poverty in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals requesting more disclosure on a company's involvement in China
- Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals that ask a company to terminate a project or investment in China.

## Product Sales to Repressive Regimes

Certain Internet technology companies have been accused of assisting repressive governments in violating human rights through the knowing misuse of their hardware and software. Human rights groups have accused companies such as Yahoo!, Cisco, Google, and Microsoft of allowing the Chinese government to censor and track down dissenting voices on the internet.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals requesting that companies cease product sales to repressive regimes that can be used to violate human rights.
- Vote for proposals to report on company efforts to reduce the likelihood of product abuses in this manner.

## Internet Privacy/Censorship and Data Security

Information technology sector companies have been at the center of shareholder advocacy campaigns regarding concerns over Internet service companies and technology providers' alleged cooperation with potentially repressive regimes, notably the Chinese government. Shareholder proposals, submitted at various companies, advocated for companies to take steps to stop abetting repression and censorship of the Internet and/or review their human rights policies taking this issue into consideration. Resolution sponsors generally argue that the Chinese government is using IT company technologies to track, monitor, identify, and, ultimately, suppress political dissent. In the view of proponents, this process of surveillance and associated suppression violates internationally accepted norms outlined in the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

While early shareholder resolutions on Internet issues focused on censorship by repressive regimes and net neutrality, proponents have recently raised concerns regarding privacy and data security in the wake of increased breaches that result in the misuse of personal information. On Oct. 13, 2011, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) issued a guidance document about the disclosure obligations relating to cybersecurity risks and cyber incidents. In the document, the SEC references the negative consequences that are associated with cyber-attacks, such as: remediation costs, including those required to repair relationships with customers and clients; increased cyber-security protection costs; lost revenues from unauthorized use of the information or missed opportunities to attract clients; litigation; and reputational damage. The document says that while the federal securities laws do not explicitly require disclosure of cybersecurity risks and incidents, some disclosure requirements may impose an obligation on the company to disclose such information and provides scenarios

where disclosure may be required. According to the FBI's 2023 Internet Crime Report, potential losses from cybercrimes hit \$12.5 billion, up 21% from 2022.<sup>22,23</sup>

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for resolutions requesting the disclosure and implementation of Internet privacy and censorship policies and procedures considering:

- The level of disclosure of policies and procedures relating to privacy, freedom of speech, Internet censorship, and government monitoring of the Internet;
- Engagement in dialogue with governments and/or relevant groups with respect to the Internet and the free flow of information;
- The scope of business involvement and of investment in markets that maintain government censorship or monitoring of the Internet;
- The market-specific laws or regulations applicable to Internet censorship or monitoring that may be imposed on the company; and
- The level of controversy or litigation related to the company's international human rights policies and procedures.

## Disclosure on Plant Closings

Shareholders have asked that companies contemplating plant closures consider the impact of such closings on employees and the community, especially when such plant closures involve a community's largest employers. Social Advisory Services usually recommends voting for greater disclosure of plant closing criteria. In cases where it can be shown that companies have been proactive and responsible in adopting these criteria, Social Advisory Services recommends against the proposal.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals seeking greater disclosure on plant closing criteria if the company has not provided such information.

## Climate Change

### Say on Climate (SoC) Management Proposals

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on management proposals that request shareholders to approve the company's climate transition action plan<sup>24</sup>, taking into account the completeness and rigor of the plan. Information that will be considered where available includes the following:

- The extent to which the company's climate related disclosures are in line with TCFD recommendations and meet other market standards;
- Disclosure of its operational and supply chain GHG emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3);
- The completeness, feasibility, and rigor of company's short-, medium-, and long-term targets for reducing operational and supply chain GHG emissions in line with Paris Agreement goals (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;

<sup>22</sup> 2023 report: <https://www.aha.org/system/files/media/file/2024/03/fbi-internet-crime-report-2023.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> 2022 report: [https://www.iafci.org/app\\_themes/docs/Federal%20Agency/2022\\_IC3Report.pdf](https://www.iafci.org/app_themes/docs/Federal%20Agency/2022_IC3Report.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> 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

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Generally vote for 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, feasibility, and rigor of the company's climate-related disclosure;
- The company's actual GHG emissions performance;
- The company's alignment with relevant internationally recognized frameworks such as the Paris Agreement and IEA's Net Zero Emissions by 2050 Scenario;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent, significant violations, fines, litigation, or controversy related to its GHG emissions; and
- Whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive.

## Climate Change/Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Climate change has emerged as the most significant environmental threat to the planet to date. Scientists generally 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 (GHG) produced by the industrial age have caused recent weather crises such as heat waves, rainstorms, melting glaciers, rising sea levels and receding coastlines. Climate change skeptics have described the rise and fall of global temperatures as naturally occurring phenomena and depicted human impact on climate change as minimal. Shareholder proposals requesting companies to issue a report to shareholders, "at reasonable cost and omitting proprietary information," on greenhouse gas emissions ask that the report include descriptions of corporate efforts to reduce emissions, companies' 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. Shareholder 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.

### **Social Advisory Services 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 or adoption of GHG goals in products and operations.
- 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 reports on greenhouse gas emissions from companies' operations and/or products.

- Vote for shareholder proposals that request the company to disclose a report on reducing methane emissions and to assess the reliability of the company's methane emission disclosures.

## Environmental Justice

Companies have faced proposals addressing environmental justice concerns, focused on vulnerable stakeholders – particularly communities of color and low-income communities – who are disproportionately impacted by environmental pollution. These heightened risks can be exacerbated by climate change.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting disclosure of an environmental justice report, as well as a third-party environmental justice assessment.

## Financed Emissions

For financial institutions and companies that provide financial services, generally vote for shareholder proposals that request the company to disclose its financed emissions. Financed emissions (scope 3, category 15) are emissions associated with a company's investments, not already covered under scopes 1 and 2 – including but not limited to equity investments, debt investments, and project finance. Information that will be considered where available includes the following:

- The completeness, feasibility, and rigor of the company's financed emissions disclosure;
- Whether the company's targets and climate transition plan are in alignment with the Paris Agreement, the International Energy Agency's (IEA) Net Zero Emissions by 2050 Scenario, and other internationally recognized frameworks;
- Whether the company's methodology is in alignment with the Greenhouse Gas Protocol (GHG Protocol), the Partnership for Carbon Accounting Financials (PCAF), and other generally accepted calculation and reporting methodologies and entities; and
- Whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive.

## Invest in Clean/Renewable Energy

Filers of proposals on renewable energy ask companies to increase their investment in renewable energy sources and to work to develop products that rely more on renewable energy sources. Increased use of renewable energy will reduce the negative environmental impact of energy companies. In addition, as supplies of oil and coal exist in the earth in limited quantities, renewable energy sources represent a competitive, and some would argue essential, long-term business strategy.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking the preparation of a report on a company's activities related to the development of renewable energy sources.
- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking increased investment in renewable energy sources unless the terms of the resolution are overly restrictive.

## Just Transition

Companies have faced proposals requesting disclosure on the just transition – addressing stakeholder concerns within a company's value chain with regards to the effects of climate change and the energy transition. Relevant stakeholder groups can include employees, suppliers (and workers in supply chains), communities impacted by operations, and other vulnerable groups potentially affected by a company's climate change strategy. Just

transition disclosure should adequately assess, consult on, and address impacts on affected stakeholders regarding climate change risks.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting just transition and labor protection disclosure, in alignment with the International Labour Organization, the World Benchmarking Alliance, and other generally accepted guidelines and indicators.

## Energy Efficiency

Reducing the negative impact to the environment can be done through the use of more energy efficient practices and products. Shareholders propose that corporations should have energy efficient manufacturing processes and should market more energy efficient products. This can be done by utilizing renewable energy sources that are cost-competitive and by implementing energy efficient operations.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals requesting a report on company energy efficiency policies and/or goals.

## Natural Capital

Natural capital disclosure has moved into the mainstream of climate change reporting. The Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework have mobilized widespread recognition of the fact that Paris Agreement-aligned targets can only be achieved by integrating natural capital-related concerns. As such, there has been increased market uptake around natural capital disclosures and commitments, particularly around TNFD-aligned reporting, as well as alignment with other internationally accepted reporting frameworks.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting disclosure of TNFD-aligned reporting, including but not limited to a biodiversity impact and dependency assessment. Information that will be considered where available includes the following:

- The completeness, feasibility, and rigor of the company's natural capital-related disclosure;
- Whether the company's natural capital disclosure adequately incorporate governance, strategy, risk and impact management, and metrics and targets;
- Whether the company's targets and climate transition plan are in alignment with TNFD, the Global Biodiversity Framework, the Paris Agreement, and other internationally recognized frameworks; and
- Whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive.

Natural capital-related shareholder proposals also encompass a broad range of industries. Various market-led initiatives have identified key sectors for investor-issuer engagement, including but not limited to: chemicals, consumer goods, food and agriculture, forestry, mining, oil and gas, packaging, and pharmaceuticals. Some proposals also address indigenous peoples' rights, which is also a key consideration for natural capital frameworks.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting companies to prepare reports or adopt sustainable sourcing policies with regards to natural capital-related risks, dependencies, and impacts.

## Environment

Proposals addressing environmental and energy concerns are plentiful, and generally seek greater disclosure on a particular issue or seek to improve a company's environmental practices in order to protect the world's natural resources. In addition, some proponents cite the negative financial implications for companies with poor

environmental practices, including liabilities associated with site clean-ups and lawsuits, as well as arguments that energy efficient products and clean environmental practices are sustainable business practices that will contribute to long-term shareholder value. Shareholders proponents point out that the majority of independent atmospheric scientists agree that global warming poses a serious problem to the health and welfare of our planet, citing the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Shareholder activists argue that companies can report on their greenhouse gas emissions within a few months at reasonable cost. The general trend indicates a movement towards encouraging companies to have proactive environmental policies, focusing on maximizing the efficient use of non-renewable resources and minimizing threats of harm to human health or the environment.

## Environmental/Sustainability Reports

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 2030, corporate signatories to the Ceres Roadmap 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.

### Social Advisory Services 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.

## Operations in Environmentally Sensitive Areas

### Canadian Oil Sands

Proposals asking for a report on oil sands operations in the Athabasca region of Alberta, Canada have appeared at a number of oil and gas companies. Alberta's oil sands contain a reserve largely thought to be one of the world's largest potential energy sources. Rising oil sands production in Alberta has been paralleled with concerns from a



variety of stakeholders—including environmental groups, local residents, and shareholders—regarding the environmental impacts of the complicated extraction and upgrading processes required to convert oil sands into a synthetic crude oil. The high viscosity of bitumen makes its extraction a challenging and resource-intensive process; the most common extraction technique involves pumping steam into the oil sands to lower the viscosity of bitumen in order to pump it to the surface.

One of the most prominent issues concerning oil sands is the large volume of greenhouse gases (GHG) associated with production. Oil sands are by far one of the most energy-intensive forms of oil production, releasing three times more GHG emissions from production than conventional oil.

Shareholders have kept up pressure on the issue of potential long-term risks to companies posed by the environmental, social, and economic challenges associated with Canadian oil sands operations. Resolutions on the topic have focused on requesting greater transparency on the ramifications of oil sands development projects.

## Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) is a federally protected wilderness along Alaska's North Slope. In the past, legislation proposed in both the House and Senate that, if passed, would allow a portion of this area to be leased to private companies for development and production of oil, has been witnessed. Oil companies have expressed an interest in bidding for these leases given the opportunity. In response, shareholder activists have filed resolutions asking these companies to cancel any plans to drill in the ANWR and cease their lobbying efforts to open the area for drilling. Proponents of shareholder proposals on this issue argue that the Coastal Plain section of the ANWR is the most environmentally sensitive area of the refuge, that the majority of Alaska's North Slope that is not federally designated wilderness already provides the oil industry with sufficient resources for oil production, and that advocates of drilling in ANWR overstate the benefit to be derived from opening the wilderness to oil production. Those in favor of opening the area up to drilling note that only a small portion of ANWR would be considered for exploration, and if drilling were to take place, it would be on less than one percent of the entire area, that modern technology reduces the environmental impact of oil drilling on both the land and surrounding wildlife, and that oil production in ANWR would have considerable benefit to company shareholders, Alaskans, and the United States as a whole.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for requests for reports on potential environmental damage as a result of company operations in protected regions.
- Vote for shareholder proposals asking companies to prepare reports or adopt policies on operations that include mining, drilling or logging in environmentally sensitive areas.
- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking to curb or reduce the sale of products manufactured from materials extracted from environmentally sensitive areas such as old growth forests.

## Hydraulic Fracturing

Shareholder proponents have elevated concerns on the use of hydraulic fracturing, an increasingly controversial process in which water, sand, and a mix of chemicals are blasted horizontally into tight layers of shale rock to extract natural gas. As this practice has gained more widespread use, environmentalists have raised concerns that the chemicals mixed with sand and water to aid the fracturing process can contaminate ground water supplies. Proponents of resolutions at companies that employ hydraulic fracturing are also concerned that wastewater produced by the process could overload the waste treatment plants to which it is shipped. Shareholders have asked companies that utilize hydraulic fracturing to report on the environmental impact of the practice and to disclose policies aimed at reducing hazards from the process.



**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for requests seeking greater transparency on the practice of hydraulic fracturing and its associated risks.

## Phase Out Chlorine-Based Chemicals

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) identified chlorine bleaching of pulp and paper as a major source of dioxin, a known human carcinogen linked to have negative effects to humans and animals. A number of shareholder proposals have been filed in recent years asking companies to report on the possible phase-out of chlorine bleaching in the production of paper because of the practice's negative environmental impact.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote for shareholder proposals to prepare a report on the phase-out of chlorine bleaching in paper production.
- Vote on a case-by-case basis on shareholder proposals asking companies to cease or phase-out the use of chlorine bleaching.

## Land Procurement and Development

Certain real estate developers including big-box large retailers have received criticism over their processes for acquiring and developing land. Given a 2005 Supreme Court decision allowing for the usage of eminent domain laws in the U.S. to take land from property-owners for tax generating purposes, as well as certain controversies outside of the U.S. with land procurement, some shareholders would like assurances that companies are acting ethically and with local stakeholders in mind.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals requesting that companies report on or adopt policies for land procurement and utilize the policies in their decision-making.

## Report on the Sustainability of Concentrated Area Feeding Operations (CAFO)

The potential environmental impact on water, aquatic ecosystems, and local areas from odor and chemical discharges from CAFOs has led to lawsuits and EPA regulations. Certain shareholders have asked companies to provide additional details on their CAFOs in addition to those with which the companies contract to raise their livestock.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for requests that companies report on the sustainability and the environmental impacts of both company-owned and contract livestock operations.

## Adopt a Comprehensive Recycling Policy

A number of companies have received proposals to step-up their recycling efforts, with the goal of reducing the company's negative impact on the environment and reducing costs over the long-term.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote for shareholder proposals requesting the preparation of a report on the company's recycling efforts.
- Vote for shareholder proposals that ask companies to increase their recycling efforts or to adopt a formal recycling policy.

## Nuclear Energy

Nuclear power continues to be a controversial method of producing electricity. Opponents of nuclear energy are primarily concerned with serious accidents and the related negative human health consequences, and with the difficulties involved in nuclear waste storage.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking the preparation of a report on a company's nuclear energy procedures.
- Vote case-by-case on proposals that ask the company to cease the production of nuclear power.

## Water Use

Shareholders may ask for a company to prepare a report evaluating the business risks linked to water use and impacts on the company's supply chain, including subsidiaries and bottling partners. Such proposals also ask companies to disclose current policies and procedures for mitigating the impact of operations on local communities in areas of water scarcity.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking the preparation of a report on a company's risks linked to water use.
- Vote for resolutions requesting companies to promote the "human right to water" as articulated by the United Nations.
- Vote for shareholder proposals requesting that companies report on or adopt policies for water use that incorporate social and environmental factors.

## Compliance to relevant Climate Accords

With the Paris Agreement operational as of November 2016, ratifying countries have agreed to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases and pursue efforts to limit global temperature increase to well below 2°C. The Agreement provides a framework for increasingly ambitious climate action to be carried out by all parties over time.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals asking companies to review and report on how they will meet GHG reduction targets of the countries in which they operate, or their compliance to relevant science-based climate accords, such as the Paris Agreement.

## Health and Safety

### Toxic Materials

#### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals asking companies to report on policies and activities to ensure product safety.
- Vote for shareholder proposals asking companies to disclose annual expenditures relating to the promotion and/or environmental cleanup of toxins.

- Vote for shareholder proposals asking companies to report on the feasibility of removing, or substituting with safer alternatives, all “harmful” ingredients used in company products.

## Product Safety

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally vote for proposals requesting the company to report on or adopt consumer product safety policies and initiatives.
- Generally vote for proposals requesting the study, adoption and/or implementation of consumer product safety programs in the company's supply chain.

## Workplace/Facility Safety

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals requesting workplace safety reports, including reports on accident risk reduction efforts.
- Vote shareholder proposals requesting companies report on or implement procedures associated with their operations and/or facilities on a case-by-case basis.

## Report on Firearm Safety Initiatives

Shareholders may ask for a company to report on policies and procedures that are aimed at curtailing the incidence of gun violence. Such a report may include: implementation of the company's contract instruction to distributors not to sell the company's weapons at gun shows or through pawn shops; recalls or retro-fits of products with safety-related defects causing death or serious injury to consumers, as well as development of systems to identify and remedy these defects; names and descriptions of products that are developed or are being developed for a combination of higher caliber/maximum capacity and greater conceal-ability; and the company's involvement in promotion campaigns that could be construed as aimed at children. The Sandy Hook Principles were established to commemorate the victims of gun violence and to encourage positive corporate behavior in response to the proliferation of gun violence in America.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals requesting the company report on risks associated with firearms, firearm sales, marketing, and societal impacts.
- Vote for shareholder proposals asking the company to report on its efforts to promote firearm safety.
- Vote for shareholder proposals asking the company to stop the sale of firearms and accessories.

## Phase-out or Label Products Containing Genetically Engineered Ingredients

Shareholders have asked companies engaged in the development of genetically modified agricultural products to adopt a policy of not marketing or distributing such products until "long term safety testing" demonstrates that they are not harmful to humans, animals or the environment. Until further long term testing demonstrates that these products are not harmful, companies in the restaurant and prepared foods industries have been asked to remove genetically altered ingredients from products they manufacture or sell, and label such products in the interim. Shareholders have also asked supermarket companies to do the same for their own private label brands.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote for shareholder proposals to label products that contain genetically engineered products or products from cloned animals.
- Vote for shareholder proposals that ask the company to phase out the use of genetically engineered ingredients in their products.
- Vote for shareholder proposals that ask the company to report on the use of genetically engineered organisms in their products.
- Vote for shareholder proposals asking for reports on the financial, legal, and operational risks posed by the use of genetically engineered organisms.

## **Tobacco-related Proposals**

Under the pressure of ongoing litigation and negative media attention due to higher youth smoking rates and e-cigarettes, tobacco companies and even non-tobacco companies with ties to the industry have received an assortment of shareholder proposals seeking increased responsibility and social consciousness from tobacco companies and firms affiliated with the tobacco industry.

In June 2009, the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act was signed into law, giving the FDA authority to regulate the tobacco industry for the first time, including the power to block or approve new products as well as the nicotine and other content in existing tobacco products. This legislation restricts tobacco marketing and sales to youth, requires warning labels, bans cigarettes and e-cigarettes with characterizing flavor, and generally implement standards for tobacco products to protect public health.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking a report on underage tobacco prevention policies and standards.
- Vote for shareholder proposals requesting a report on the public health risk of tobacco sales.
- Vote for shareholder proposals asking producers of tobacco product components (such as filters, adhesives, flavorings, and paper products) to halt sales to tobacco companies or produce a report outlining the risks and potential liabilities of the production of these components.
- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking a report on a tobacco company's advertising approach.
- Vote for shareholder proposals to cease investment in tobacco companies.
- Vote for proposals calling for tobacco companies to cease the production of tobacco products.

## **Adopt Policy/Report on Drug Pricing**

Pharmaceutical drug pricing, both within the United States and internationally, has raised many questions of the companies that are responsible for creating and marketing these treatments. Shareholder proponents, activists and even some legislators have called upon drug companies to restrain pricing of prescription drugs.

The high cost of prescription drugs is a vital issue for senior citizens across the country. Seniors have the greatest need for prescription drugs, accounting for a significant portion of all prescription drug sales, but they often live on fixed incomes and are underinsured.

Proponents note that efforts to reign-in pharmaceutical costs will not negatively impact research and development (R&D) costs and that retail drug prices are consistently higher in the U.S. than in other industrialized nations. Pharmaceutical companies often respond that adopting a formal drug pricing policy could put the company at a competitive disadvantage.

Against the backdrop of the AIDS crisis in Africa, many shareholders have called on companies to address the issue of affordable drugs for the treatment of AIDS, as well as tuberculosis and malaria throughout low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). When analyzing such resolutions, consideration should be made of the strategic implications of pricing policies in the market.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote for shareholder proposals to prepare a report on drug pricing.
- Vote for shareholder proposals to adopt a formal policy on drug pricing.
- Vote for shareholder proposals that call on companies to develop a policy to provide affordable HIV, AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria drugs in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC).
- Vote for proposals asking for reports on the economic effects and legal risks of limiting pharmaceutical products to Canada or certain wholesalers.
- Vote case-by-case proposals requesting that companies adopt policies not to constrain prescription drug re-importation by limiting supplies to foreign markets.

## Government and Military

Weapons-related proposals may target handguns, landmines, defense contracting, or sale of weapons to foreign governments.

### Prepare Report to Renounce Future Landmine Production

Although very few companies currently produce landmines, some companies continue to have links to landmine production or produce components that are used to make landmines. Shareholders have asked companies to renounce the future development of landmines or their components, or to prepare a report on the feasibility of such a renouncement.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals seeking a report on the renouncement of future landmine production.

### Prepare Report on Foreign Military Sales

Shareholders have filed proxy resolutions asking companies to account for their policies surrounding the sale of military equipment to foreign governments. The proposals can take various forms. One resolution simply calls on companies to report on their foreign military sales, provide information on military product exports, disclose the company's basis for determining whether those sales should be made, and any procedures used to market or negotiate those sales. Another resolution calls for companies to report on "offsets" e.g. guarantee of new jobs in the purchasing country and technology transfers. Offsets involve a commitment by military contractors and the U.S. government to direct benefits back to a foreign government as a condition of a military sale.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote for shareholder proposals to report on foreign military sales or offset agreements.
- Vote case-by-case on proposals that call for outright restrictions on foreign military sales.

## Depleted Uranium/Nuclear Weapons

Depleted uranium is the less radioactive uranium that is left behind after enriched uranium is produced for nuclear reactor fuel and fissile material for nuclear weapons. The main difference is that depleted uranium contains at

least three times less U-235 than natural uranium. However, it is still weakly radioactive. Shareholders want reports on companies' policies, procedures and involvement in the said substance and nuclear weapons.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals requesting a report on involvement, policies, and procedures related to depleted uranium and nuclear weapons.

## Adopt Ethical Criteria for Weapons Contracts

Shareholders have requested that companies review their code of conduct and statements of ethical criteria for military production-related contract bids, awards, and execution to incorporate environmental factors and sustainability issues related to the contract bidding process. Sustainability is a business model that requires companies to balance the needs and interests of various stakeholders while concurrently sustaining their businesses, communities, and the environment for future generations.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals asking companies to review and amend, if necessary, the company's code of conduct and statements of ethical criteria for military production-related contract bids, awards and execution.

## Animal Welfare

### Animal Rights/Testing

Shareholders and animal rights groups, including People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), may file resolutions calling for the end to painful and unnecessary animal testing on laboratory animals by companies developing products for the cosmetics and medical supply industry. Since advanced testing methods now produce many reliable results without the use of live animals, Social Advisory Services generally supports proposals on this issue. In cases where it can be determined that alternative testing methods are unreliable or are required by law, Social Advisory Services recommends voting against such proposals. Other resolutions call for the adoption of animal welfare standards that would ensure humane treatment of animals on vendors' farms and slaughter houses. Social Advisory Services will generally vote in favor of such resolutions.

#### **Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote for shareholder proposals that seek to limit unnecessary animal testing where alternative testing methods are feasible or not barred by law.
- Vote for shareholder proposals that ask companies to adopt or/and report on company animal welfare standards or animal-related risks.
- Vote for shareholder proposals asking companies to report on the operational costs and liabilities associated with selling animals.
- Vote for shareholder proposals to eliminate cruel product testing methods.
- Vote for shareholder proposals that seek to monitor, limit, report, or eliminate the outsourcing of animal testing to overseas laboratories.
- Vote for shareholder proposals to adopt or adhere to a public animal welfare policy at both company and contracted laboratory levels.
- Vote for shareholder proposals to evaluate, adopt, or require suppliers to adopt Controlled Atmosphere Killing (CAK) slaughter methods.

## Political and Charitable Giving

### Lobbying Efforts

Shareholders have asked companies to report on their lobbying efforts on proposed legislation or to refute established scientific research regarding climate change, the health effects of smoking, fuel efficiency standards etc. Proponents have pointed to potential legislation on climate change, the lethargic pace of improvements in fuel efficiency standards in the U.S. automotive industry, and the highly litigious nature surrounding the tobacco industry as rationales for greater transparency on corporate lobbying practices that would shed light on whether companies are acting in the best long-term interests of their shareholders. Proponents of lobbying resolutions typically request enhanced disclosure of lobbying policies and expenditures, including a report on the policies and procedures related to lobbying, amounts used for various types of lobbying, and any membership or payments to a tax-exempt organization that writes and endorses model legislation.

#### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals asking companies to review and report on their lobbying activities, including efforts to challenge scientific research and influence governmental legislation.
- Vote for proposals requesting information on a company's lobbying (including direct, indirect, and grassroots lobbying) activities, policies, or procedures.

### Political Contributions/Non-Partisanship

As evidenced by the U.S. Supreme Court's January 2010 decision in *Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission* that lifted restrictions on corporate spending in federal elections, changes in legislation that governs corporate political giving have, rather than limiting such contributions, increased the potential for corporate contributions to the political process and the complexity of tracking such contributions.

Proponents of political spending resolutions generally call for enhanced disclosure of political contributions, including a report on the policies and procedures for corporate political campaign contributions and trade association expenditures, the respective amounts of such donations using company funds, or an assessment of the impacts of such contributions on the firm's image, sales and profitability. Shareholder advocates of these proposals are concerned with the lack of transparency on political giving and the increasing involvement and influence of corporations in the political process.

#### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for proposals calling for a company to disclose political and trade association contributions, unless the terms of the proposal are unduly restrictive.
- Vote for proposals calling for a company to maintain a policy of political non-partisanship.
- Vote against proposals asking a company to refrain from making any political contributions.

### Political Expenditures and Lobbying Congruency

**Social Advisory Services 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, Social 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.

## Charitable Contributions

Shareholder proponents of charitable-contributions related resolutions may seek greater disclosure on a company's charitable donations including dollar amounts, sponsorships, and policies on corporate philanthropy. Social Advisory Services is generally supportive of increased transparency around corporate charitable giving. However, some resolutions extend beyond mere disclosure requests and attempt to influence or restrict companies' contributions to specific types of beneficiaries in a manner that furthers particular objectives supported by the proposal sponsors. Social Advisory Services believes that management is better positioned to decide what criteria are appropriate for making corporate charitable contributions. Also, some of the proposals may require companies to poll their shareholders as part of the grant-making process. Since majority of companies generally have thousands of shareholders, contacting, confirming, and processing each individual opinion and/or consent would be a burdensome and expensive exercise.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally vote for shareholder resolutions seeking enhanced transparency on corporate philanthropy.
- Vote against shareholder proposals imposing charitable giving criteria or requiring shareholder ratification of grants.
- Vote against shareholder proposals requesting that companies prohibit charitable contributions.

## Disclosure on Prior Government Service

Shareholders have asked companies to disclose the identity of any senior executive and/or other high-level employee, consultant, lobbyist, attorney, or investment banker who has served in government. Although the movement of individuals between government and the private sector may benefit both, the potential also exists for conflicts of interest, especially in industries that have extensive dealings with government agencies.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals calling for the disclosure of prior government service of the company's key executives.

## Consumer Lending and Economic Development

### Adopt Policy/Report on Predatory Lending Practices

Predatory lending involves charging excessive fees to subprime borrowers without adequate disclosure. More specifically, predatory lending includes misleading subprime borrowers about the terms of a loan, charging excessive fees that are folded into the body of a refinancing loan, including life insurance policies or other unnecessary additions to a mortgage, or lending to homeowners with insufficient income to cover loan payments.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals seeking the development of a policy or preparation of a report to guard against predatory lending practices.

## Disclosure on Credit in Low- and Lower-middle-income countries (LMIC) or Forgive LMIC Debt

Shareholders have asked banks and other financial services firms to develop and disclose lending policies for low- and lower-middle-income countries (LMIC). Proponents are concerned that, without such policies, lending to LMIC may contribute to the outflow of capital, the inefficient use of capital, and corruption, all of which increase the risk of loan loss. In the interest of promoting improved LMIC lending practices and responsible loan disclosure, Social Advisory Services generally supports voting for such proposals. In cases where it can be determined that companies have been proactive and responsible in developing such policies, Social Advisory Services may recommend a vote against the proposal's adoption. Social Advisory Services usually opposes proposals that call for outright loan forgiveness; such action represents an unacceptable loss to lending institutions and their shareholders. Social Advisory Services may support such proposals at banks that have failed to make reasonable provisions for non-performing loans as a means to encourage a change in policy.

### Social Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals asking for disclosure on lending practices in low and lower-middle-income countries, unless the company has demonstrated a clear proactive record on the issue.
- Vote against shareholder proposals asking banks to forgive loans outright.
- Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals asking for loan forgiveness at banks that have failed to make reasonable provisions for non-performing loans.
- Vote for proposals to restructure and extend the terms of non-performing loans.

## Community Investing

Shareholders may ask for a company to prepare a report addressing the company's community investing efforts. Such proposals also ask companies to review their policies regarding their investments in different communities.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for proposals that seek a policy review or report addressing the company's community investing efforts.

## Miscellaneous

### Adult Entertainment

Traditionally, there have not been many proposals filed in the area of adult entertainment. However, with the consolidation of the communications industry, a number of large companies have ended up with ownership of cable companies. These cable companies may offer their customers access to pay-per-view programming or channels intended for adult audiences. Proponents of shareholder proposals on this issue ask cable companies and companies with interests in cable companies to assess the costs and benefits of continuing to distribute sexually-explicit content, including the potential negative impact on the company's image.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals that seek a review of the company's involvement with pornography.

## Abortion/Right to Life Issues

Shareholder proposals pertaining to abortion and right to life issues have appeared more frequently recently, especially in the aftermath of the U.S. Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* in 2022. Social Advisory Services considers each shareholder proposal on its individual merit, rather than relying on a wide-reaching policy application, and considers numerous contributing factors such as legislative updates, health privacy rights, and language of the proposal.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Decided on a case-by-case basis.

## Anti-Social Proposals

A number of ‘anti-social’ shareholder proposals have been filed at companies requesting increased disclosure. While these proposals’ requests are very similar to those submitted by shareholder advocates within traditional socially responsible investor circles, the underlying motives for filing the proposals appear to be very different. In addition to charitable contribution proposals, anti-social proposals addressing climate change, sustainability, and conflicts of interest may be seen at shareholder meetings. Despite implicitly different motivations in some of these proposals, the underlying requests for increased disclosure, in some cases, may be worth shareholder support.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote against shareholder proposals that do not seek to ultimately advance the goals of the social investment community.
- Vote case-by-case on anti-social shareholder proposals seeking a review or report on the company’s charitable contributions.

## Tax Transparency

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Generally vote for shareholder proposals that request the company to disclose on tax transparency and country-by-country reporting (CbCR), in alignment with internationally-accepted frameworks, such as the Global Reporting Initiative Tax Standard (GRI 207: Tax 2019) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) BEPS Action 13 (Base Erosion and Profit Shifting).

## Violence and Adult Themes in Video Games

Perceptions of increased sex and violence in video games have led certain shareholders to question the availability of adult-themed content to children and teens. The Entertainment Software Ratings Board, which provides ratings for video games, has classified approximately 34 percent of the total games it reviews as either Teen, Mature, or Adults Only.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for shareholder proposals asking for reports on company policies related to the sale of mature-rated video games to children and teens.

## Link Compensation to Non-Financial Factors

Proponents of these proposals feel that social and environmental criteria should be factored into the formulas used in determining executive compensation packages. The shareholder sponsors of the resolutions look to companies to review current compensation practices and to include social or environmental performance criteria such as accounting for “poor corporate citizenship” and meeting environmental or workplace safety objectives and metrics when evaluating executive compensation. Some of the non-financial criteria that proponents of these

resolutions seek to be incorporated in compensation program design include workplace safety, environmental stewardship, or diversity and customer/employee satisfaction – as part of a written policy used to align compensation with performance on non-financial factors alongside financial criteria.

Proponents believe that factors such as poor environmental performance, workplace lawsuits, etc. could have a significant adverse impact on a company's financial performance if not proactively and adequately addressed, and that these factors *should* be considered along with traditional financial considerations when determining executive pay. The significant stock price declines and massive losses in shareholder value stemming from the BP Deepwater Horizon oil rig disaster and the tragic explosion at Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch mine that killed 29 employees is a sobering reminder of the need to have the right management incentives in place to ensure that social and environmental risks are actively managed and mitigated against. Given the proliferation of derivative lawsuits targeted at firms such as Halliburton, Transocean and Cameron International that were suppliers to or partners with BP in a capacity that ignored safety considerations or that contributed to the economic and ecological disaster, investors are increasingly mindful of the far-reaching implications that exposure to social or environmental risks could have on shareholder value at portfolio companies.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote for shareholder proposals calling for linkage of executive pay to non-financial factors including performance against social and environmental goals, customer/employee satisfaction, corporate downsizing, community involvement, human rights, or predatory lending.
- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking reports on linking executive pay to non-financial factors.

## 9. Mutual Fund Proxies

### Election of Trustees and Directors

**Social Advisory Services 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

**Social Advisory Services 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.

### Investment Advisory Agreement

An investment advisory agreement is an agreement between a mutual fund and its financial advisor under which the financial advisor provides investment advice to the fund in return for a fee based on the fund's net asset size.

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Votes on investment advisory agreements should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, 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).

## Changing a Fundamental Restriction to a Non-fundamental Restriction

Fundamental investment restrictions are limitations within a fund's articles of incorporation that limit the investment practices of the particular fund.

**Social Advisory Services 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 Non-fundamental

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote against proposals to change a fund's fundamental investment objective to non-fundamental.

## Distribution Agreements

Distribution agreements are agreements between a fund and its distributor which provide that the distributor is paid a fee to promote the sale of the fund's shares.

**Social Advisory Services 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; and
- The terms of the agreement.

## Approving New Classes or Series of Shares

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote for the establishment of new classes or series of shares.

## Convert Closed-end Fund to Open-end Fund

Although approval of these proposals would eliminate the discount at which the fund's shares trade. The costs associated with converting the fund, in addition to the potential risks to long-term shareholder value, outweigh the potential benefits of the conversion.

**Social Advisory Services 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

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## Preferred Stock Proposals

**Social Advisory Services 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.

## Mergers

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on merger proposals, considering the following factors:

- Resulting fee structure;
- Performance of both funds;
- Continuity of management personnel; and
- Changes in corporate governance and their impact on shareholder rights.

## Business Development Companies – Authorization to Sell Shares of Common Stock at a Price below Net Asset Value

**Social Advisory Services 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 that is less than one year from the date shareholders approve the underlying proposal, as required under the Investment Company Act of 1940;
- A majority of the independent directors who have no financial interest in the sale have made a determination as to whether such sale would be in the best interests of the company and its shareholders prior to selling shares below NAV; 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.

## Change in Fund's Subclassification

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on changes in a fund's sub-classification, considering the following factors: a) potential competitiveness; b) current and potential returns; c) risk of concentration; d) consolidation in target industry.

## Changing the Domicile of a Fund

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on re-incorporations, considering the following factors: a) regulations of both states; b) required fundamental policies of both states; c) the increased flexibility available.

## Disposition of Assets/Termination/Liquidation

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on proposals to dispose of assets, to terminate or liquidate, considering the following factors: a) strategies employed to salvage the company; b) the fund's past performance; c) the terms of the liquidation.

## Authorizing the Board to Hire and Terminate Subadvisers Without Shareholder Approval

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote against proposals authorizing the board to hire or terminate subadvisers without shareholder approval if the investment adviser currently employs only one subadviser.

## Name Change Proposals

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on name change proposals, considering the following factors: a) political/economic changes in the target market; b) consolidation in the target market; and c) current asset composition.

## 1940 Act Policies

**Social Advisory Services Recommendation:**

- Vote case-by-case on policies under the Investment Advisor Act of 1940, considering the following factors: a) potential competitiveness; b) regulatory developments; c) current and potential returns; and d) 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.



We empower investors and companies to build for long-term and sustainable growth by providing high-quality data, analytics, and insight.

#### GET STARTED WITH ISS SOLUTIONS

Email [sales@issgovernance.com](mailto:sales@issgovernance.com) or visit [www.issgovernance.com](http://www.issgovernance.com) for more information.

Founded in 1985, Institutional Shareholder Services group of companies (ISS) empowers investors and companies to build for long-term and sustainable growth by providing high-quality data, analytics and insight. ISS, which is majority owned by Deutsche Bourse Group, along with Genstar Capital and ISS management, is a leading provider of corporate governance and responsible investment solutions, market intelligence, fund services, and events and editorial content for institutional investors and corporations, globally. ISS' 2,600 employees operate worldwide across 29 global locations in 15 countries. Its approximately 3,400 clients include many of the world's leading institutional investors who rely on ISS' objective and impartial offerings, as well as public companies focused on ESG and governance risk mitigation as a shareholder value enhancing measure. Clients rely on ISS' expertise to help them make informed investment decisions. This document and all of the information contained in it, including without limitation all text, data, graphs, and charts (collectively, the "Information") is the property of Institutional Shareholder Services Inc. (ISS), its subsidiaries, or, in some cases third party suppliers.

The Information has not been submitted to, nor received approval from, the United States Securities and Exchange Commission or any other regulatory body. None of the Information constitutes an offer to sell (or a solicitation of an offer to buy), or a promotion or recommendation of, any security, financial product or other investment vehicle or any trading strategy, and ISS does not endorse, approve, or otherwise express any opinion regarding any issuer, securities, financial products or instruments or trading strategies.

The user of the Information assumes the entire risk of any use it may make or permit to be made of the Information.

ISS MAKES NO EXPRESS OR IMPLIED WARRANTIES OR REPRESENTATIONS WITH RESPECT TO THE INFORMATION AND EXPRESSLY DISCLAIMS ALL IMPLIED WARRANTIES (INCLUDING, WITHOUT LIMITATION, ANY IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF ORIGINALITY, ACCURACY, TIMELINESS, NON-INFRINGEMENT, COMPLETENESS, MERCHANTABILITY, AND FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE) WITH RESPECT TO ANY OF THE INFORMATION.

Without limiting any of the foregoing and to the maximum extent permitted by law, in no event shall ISS have any liability regarding any of the Information for any direct, indirect, special, punitive, consequential (including lost profits), or any other damages even if notified of the possibility of such damages. The foregoing shall not exclude or limit any liability that may not by applicable law be excluded or limited.

© 2025 | Institutional Shareholder Services and/or its affiliates