

Non-Profit Board's Guide To Building an Effective Investment Committee

How To Position Your Investment Committee To Be Successful
Stewards of the Organization's Assets

Investment Committees: **A Vital Piece of a Well-Functioning Board**

Investment committees play a critical role in the success of any foundation, endowment or other non-profit organization. Capital is the lifeblood that fuels an organization's ability to fulfil its mission, and effective stewardship of that capital starts with having an effective investment committee.

Having a strong, well-functioning investment committee doesn't happen by accident, and it takes more than just identifying members who have investment experience. It takes alignment with the organization's mission, strong governance, effective engagement with the board and outside investment professionals, and a commitment to creating the right team dynamic within the committee.

We explore the characteristics of highly effective investment committees and discuss the best practices for building a committee that provides strong stewardship of the organization's assets.

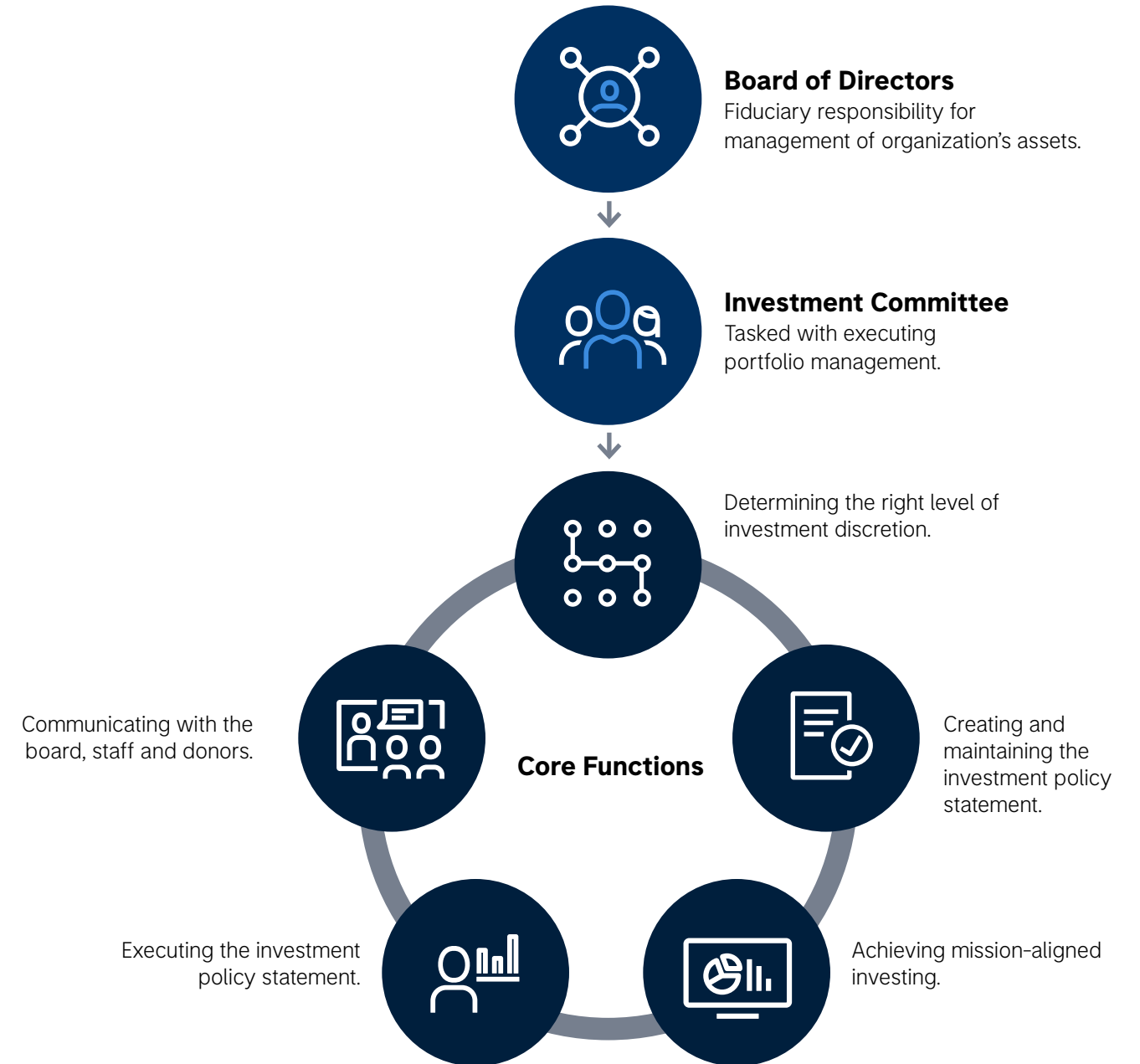
In this e-book, we explore:

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Understanding the Investment Committee's Role

The board ultimately has fiduciary responsibility for the management of the organization's assets. Many boards choose to form an investment committee, which often is a subcommittee of the finance committee, and tasked with executing this work.

Overseeing the organization's assets can take many different forms depending on the size and type of the organization. Fundamentally, this oversight will include several core functions.



Determining the Right Level of Investment Discretion

Boards need to decide how much control they want the investment committee to have over managing assets and what level of decision-making and execution they want to handle internally vs. outsource.

The right level of involvement in investment decisions typically is a function of the organization's size and the investment committee's capabilities and knowledge. Smaller organizations' investment committees tend to outsource more of these responsibilities whereas the committees of larger organizations may look to retain more direct control over the day-to-day decision-making and execution.

Traditionally, boards may favor one end of the discretion spectrum or the other, but some are now using a hybrid approach that tailors their consultant engagement model to fit their desired level of involvement. For example, a board may want to give a consultant full discretion in managing public equities and public bonds, but when it comes to private assets, which often have long lock-up periods, the board will retain discretion and seek the consultant's guidance.

Traditional Consulting

Project-oriented approach driven by the client's needs.

Consultants

Help investment committee make informed decisions on manager search and special studies; provide portfolio monitoring and performance reporting.

Investment Committee

Responsible for portfolio construction and implementation.

Partial Discretionary

Collaborative approach between the client and consultant.

Consultants

Assist with investment objectives and guidelines; provide portfolio monitoring and performance reporting.

Investment Committee

Determines which investment decisions require approval

Collaborative Portfolio Management

Either party can be responsible for construction and implementation.

Full Discretionary

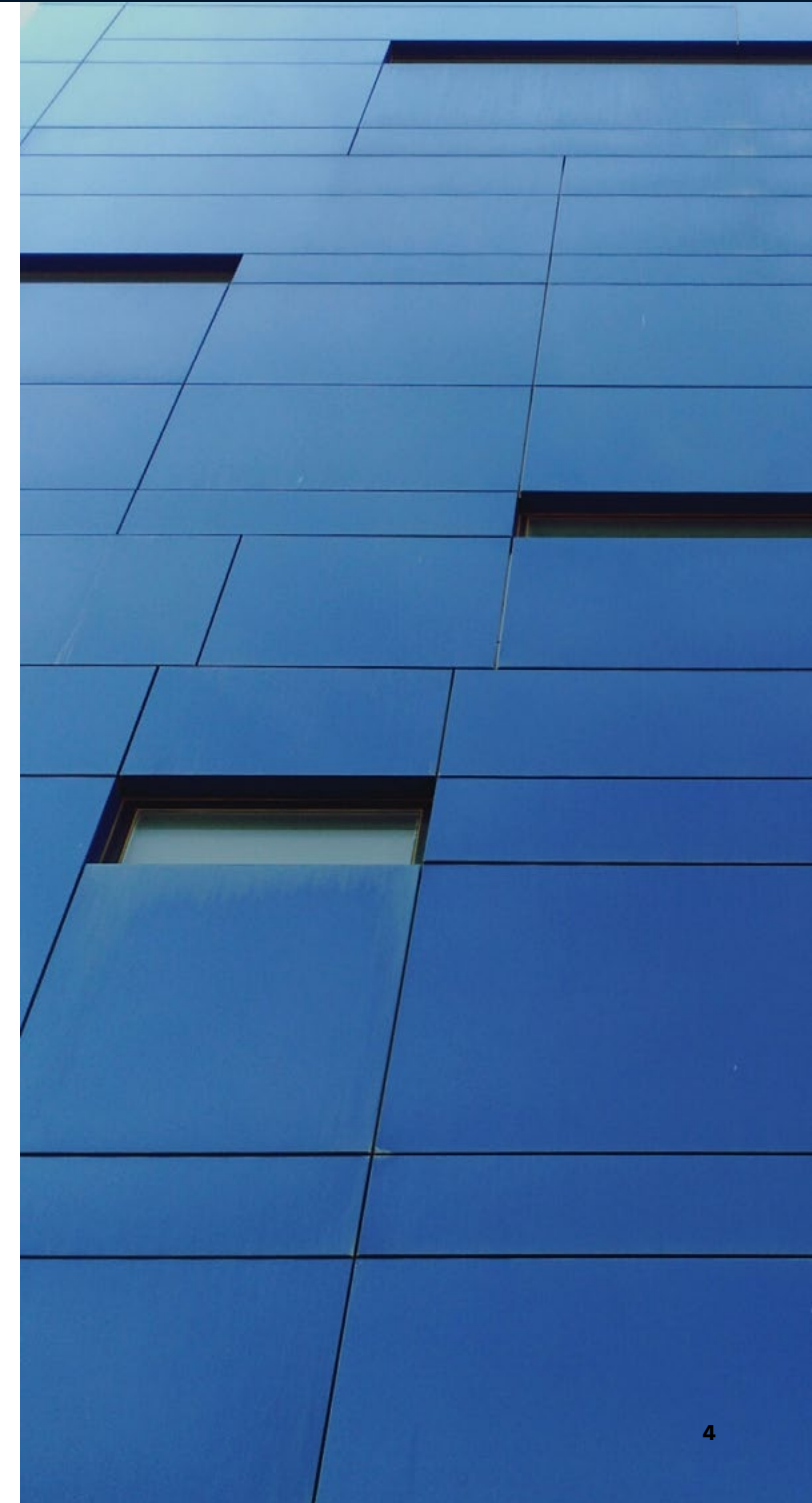
Outsourced Chief Investment Office (OCIO) approach overseen by the client.

Consultants

Responsible for asset allocation, manager due diligence and selection, risk management, and all other day-to-day tasks.

Investment Committee

Focused on monitoring the big picture rather than day-to-day decisions.



Creating and Maintaining the Investment Policy Statement

The [investment policy statement](#) (IPS) is the foundation of the investment committee's work and serves as the governance blueprint. The IPS codifies the board's authority and guides the investment committee's decision-making.

Best practices for crafting and maintaining an effective IPS:

- **Work with your board and consultants to develop and maintain the IPS:** Although the investment committee is typically tasked with developing the IPS, the committee shouldn't act in a vacuum. The board's consultants can be extremely helpful, either by helping to draft the IPS or by identifying ways to update or improve it. The board is ultimately responsible for approving the IPS, so the investment committee and consultants need to keep the board informed throughout the process.
- **Review the IPS at least annually:** The IPS needs to reflect changes at the organization, board, or investment committee level. Furthermore, the IPS needs to reflect any changes the board has made related to how it wants to manage and oversee the assets. Major changes in market conditions or in the organization's budget, such as a transformational gift or the approval of a major capital project, can also merit reviewing the IPS ahead of the annual cycle.
- **Document your changes:** Keep a revision history of the IPS so future board members can see how the document has evolved.
- **Don't include policies or practices that your board can't implement and monitor:** A common mistake that investment committees make is codifying things in the IPS that the committee can't properly execute or monitor.

Elements of an Investment Policy Statement:

While the scope of an IPS can vary across organizations, this document should contain the following core elements:

Governance

- Purpose of the IPS and use of funds to support the organization's mission.
- Number of members on the investment committee and specific roles and subcommittees.
- Cadence of meetings.
- Roles and responsibilities of investment committee members, consultants, and other advisors.
- Criteria for what decisions can be made independently by the investment committee and what needs to be approved by the board.

Investment

- Investment objective.
- Spending policy and smoothing technique.
- Asset allocation, including targets/bands, target returns, benchmarks, and rebalancing policy.
- Liquidity constraints.
- Manager and consultant selection process.
- Investment restrictions and mission-alignment considerations.

Achieving Mission-Aligned Investing

Boards and their investment committees are increasingly looking for ways to support the companies, governments and projects in which the organization is investing in are using that capital in a way that aligns with the organization's larger mission.

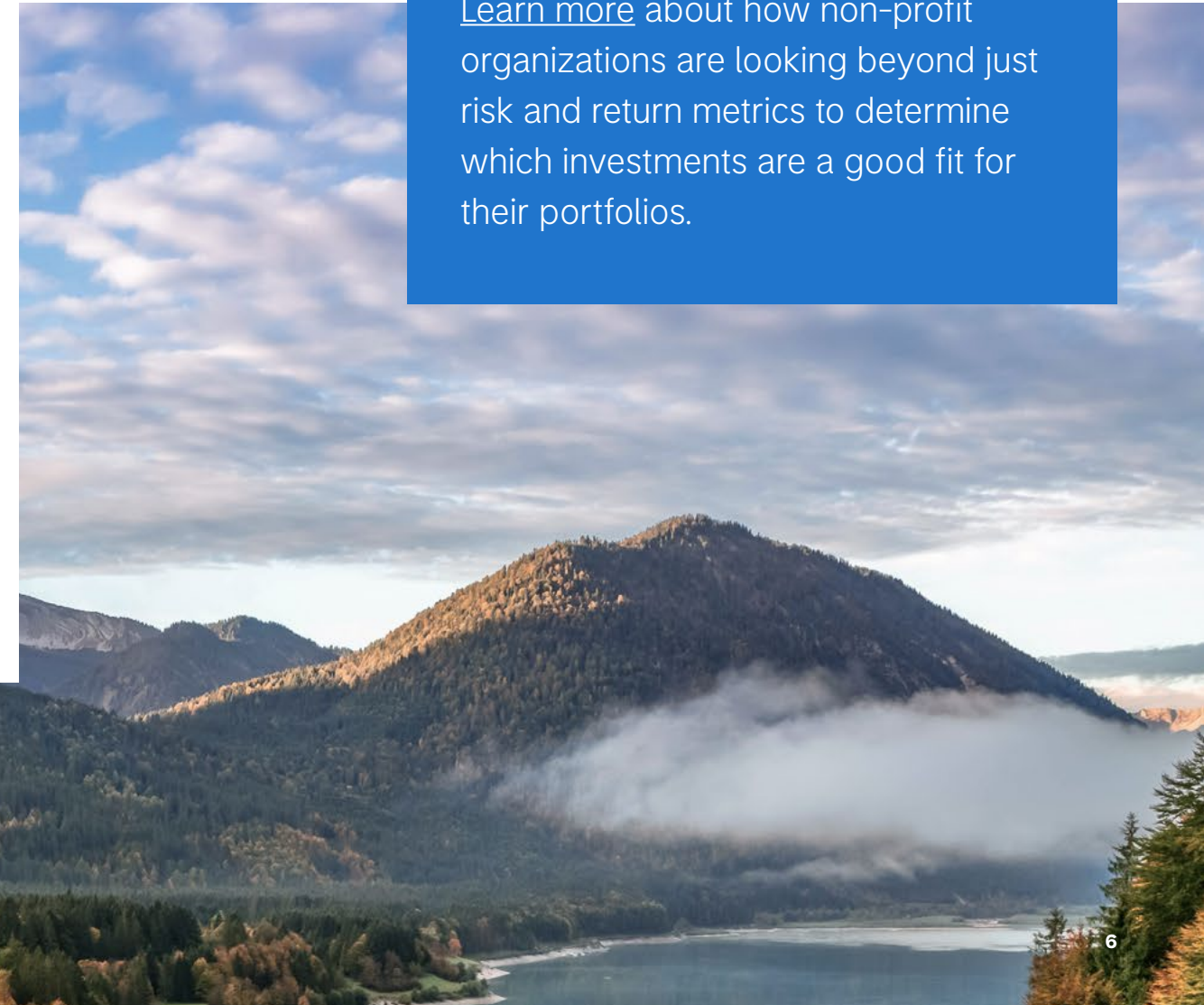
At a minimum, mission-alignment involves avoiding investments that undermine the organization's intended social or environmental impact or contradict the organization's values. For example, the board of an aquarium may choose to divest the stocks of companies with operations that damage marine wildlife habitats.

A more comprehensive view of mission-aligned investing also seeks investments that can have a positive impact and extend the organization's reach beyond its own operations. For example, the endowment for a college that caters to lower-income adult learners may invest in education technology companies focused on making learning opportunities more accessible for all students.

The assets overseen by the investment committee can do more to support the organization's broader mission than simply providing funds for the operating budget.

Dive Deeper Into Mission-Aligned Investing

[Learn more](#) about how non-profit organizations are looking beyond just risk and return metrics to determine which investments are a good fit for their portfolios.



Oversight of the IPS Execution

A critical part of the board's fiduciary responsibility is making sure that the asset allocation, rebalancing and other policies set forth in the IPS are being monitored and properly executed.

This involves managing the relationships with and monitoring the performance of asset managers, consultants and other external advisors the investment committee has engaged.

Retained Discretion: If the investment committee has retained discretion of manager selection and investment execution, helping ensure proper execution of the IPS entails conducting due diligence on the front end and then monitoring the performance of these investments. It also involves rebalancing to ensure that the portfolio remains within the target asset allocation ranges and liquidity constraints.

Outsourced Discretion: If the investment committee has given discretion to a consultant or an OCIO, helping ensure proper IPS execution focuses on maintaining constant communication with the external advisors to make sure they are managing the portfolio and providing reporting and manager oversight in alignment with the IPS.

Communicating With the Board, Staff and Donors

Investment committees shouldn't operate in a vacuum. It's vital to stay connected with the board and other key stakeholders.

Board: In addition to keeping the board informed about the investment committee's activities and the performance of the portfolio, many major investment decisions require the board's approval. These may include engaging a consultant, setting the spending policy, or investing in a private company. With higher-stakes decisions like these, the investment committee needs to help ensure that the board understands the nuances of the decision and its financial implications. This often requires having consultants prepare materials and give presentations to educate board members on investment fundamentals and the considerations related to specific investment decisions.

Staff: The investment committee also may need to work with the organization's Chief Financial Officer and other financial staff to share information that is critical to the management of the portfolio and the execution of the investment decisions.

Donors: Many large donors will want to know how the assets are being managed and consider ways to build a financial legacy through their gifts.

2

Building the Right Team

In addition to having the right objectives and governance, an investment committee needs the right people to thrive. This comes down to not just identifying the right individuals to serve on the investment committee, but also creating the right structure and team dynamic so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.



Composition of an
Investment Committee



Qualities of Effective
Investment Committee
Members



Finding the Right Person to
Chair the Committee



Composition of an Investment Committee

The makeup of an investment committee has important implications for how effectively the unit functions from logistical and interpersonal perspectives.



Size

Generally speaking, size should be tailored to the particular circumstances of the organization. For example, a larger committee might be preferable when busy members have trouble attending scheduled meetings, making a quorum difficult to achieve. Typically, a committee with five to nine members is optimal, but every organization must make a thoughtful decision based on its unique needs.



Team Dynamic

Like any team, culture and chemistry are essential for a successful investment committee. All members should be fully engaged in the conversations and decision-making. Avoid situations where one member dominates the conversations while others don't join discussions or ask questions.



Level of Investment Experience

Having people with investment experience is essential for an effective investment committee, and the amount of knowledge needed will vary by organization. For committees that retain discretion of decision-making and execution, it is helpful if most members have either worked in the investment industry and/or have served on an investment committee. This is particularly true for organizations that have large allocations to private, illiquid asset classes, which require a deeper understanding of liquidity considerations and deal structuring. For investment committees that give more discretion to consultants, it is still important to have members with investment experience, but there is more room for members without this professional experience.



Diversity of Thought

While having a concentration of people with investment experience is essential, it is also important to bring diverse perspectives and experiences to these discussions. Creating an investment committee that comprises true diversity of thought can strengthen decision-making by reducing the risk of group-think and help ensure that the investment portfolio reflects the organization's mission and values.

Qualities of Effective Investment Committee Members

Boards should look for people with the following characteristics when assembling an investment committee.



Willingness to Prepare

Being an effective investment committee member is no small task. It takes, perhaps, more preparation than any other committee. Before each quarterly meeting, consultants will deliver reports on the performance of the organization's managers and assets. Investment committee members need to read and understand these reports—while identifying areas that need more explaining—ahead of time so they can fully engage in the discussion at that quarter's meeting.



Long-Term, Institutional Perspective

Retail biases—including being reactive to short-term market results and failing to appreciate the difference between managing assets for an institution versus an individual—are among the biggest threats to an investment committee's decision-making. Committee members need to view the organization's portfolio through the lens of an institutional asset manager and think in terms of generating returns in the context of the organization's spending needs, liabilities and capacity for illiquid investments.



Eagerness to Learn and Ask Questions

Even investment committee members who have professional investment experience need to come to the committee with humility, self-awareness and an eagerness to learn. Members need to be open-minded about the ideas presented by consultants and fellow committee members. When topics arise that members don't understand, they need to ask questions and be willing to challenge the assumptions being made by others in the room.



Alignment With Organization's Interests and Mission

In addition to thinking like an institutional investor, investment committee members need to ensure that they are fully aligned with the organization's mission, values, and objectives. An important aspect of this is making sure that they don't have any personal or professional interests that conflict with the organization's. In some cases, members may need to recuse themselves from decisions where their interests or biases may conflict with what's best for the organization.

Finding the Right Person to Chair the Committee

Strong leadership is essential for a well-functioning investment committee. Leading this group is no small task.

The chairperson is responsible for ensuring that the investment committee meets all its responsibilities in executing the IPS. Thus, the person chosen to chair the committee needs the investment knowledge and interpersonal skills required to manage a heavy responsibility.

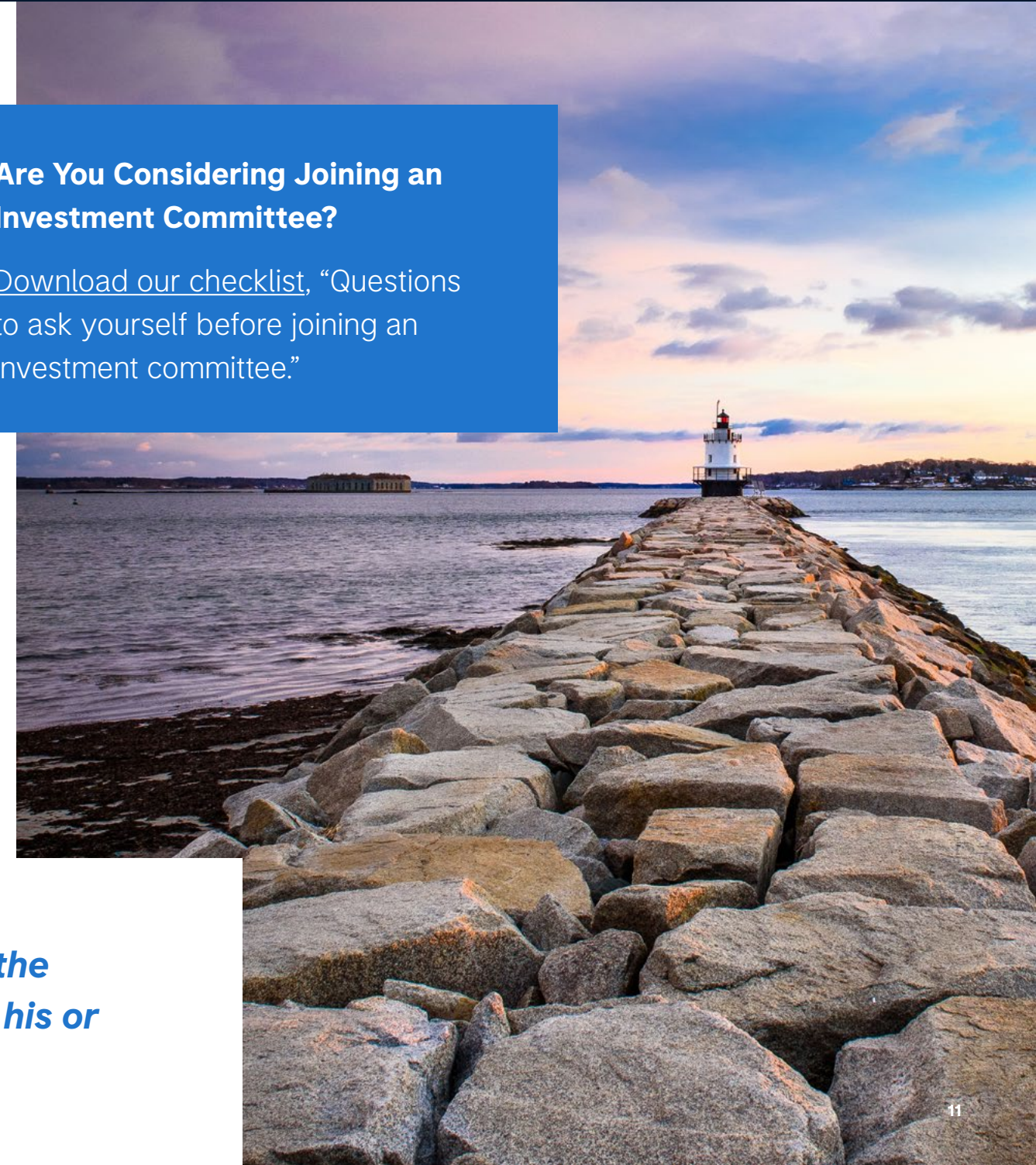
Fulfilling these duties involves setting the agenda for and leading the quarterly meetings and working with consultants and asset managers throughout the year to make sure they are executing the goals set forth in the IPS.

The chairperson is also responsible for making sure the investment committee is operating with excellence. In addition to educating all committee members on their responsibilities, the chairperson needs to be adept at having frank conversations with members who aren't meeting those expectations, providing education and guidance to elevate the productivity of members and, if necessary, removing members who aren't able to fulfill their roles.

The chairperson must have the tact and leadership skills needed to help the group reach consensus without unduly influencing the deliberations with his or her own opinions.

Are You Considering Joining an Investment Committee?

[Download our checklist](#), "Questions to ask yourself before joining an investment committee."



3

Getting the Most Out of Your Consulting Engagement

The consultants chosen by an investment committee play a vital role in the organization's success.

Identifying the appropriate type of consulting engagement—non-discretionary, full discretion or something in between—is a critical decision that depends on many factors that are specific to each organization. Regardless of which model is used, there are several characteristics that investment committees should seek to maximize the value of their consultant relationship.



**Value-Added,
Comprehensive Services**



**Ability to Be Responsive
and Nimble**



Customization Capabilities



Value-Added, Comprehensive Services

A consultant's value proposition can extend far beyond the core service offering. Investment committees should look for partners that can provide comprehensive support in high-value areas.

Value-Added Services

Committee Member
Training

Mission-Aligned
Investing

Educational
Programs

Donor
Engagement

Core Services

IPS Development

Manager Selection

Market
Commentary

Asset Allocation

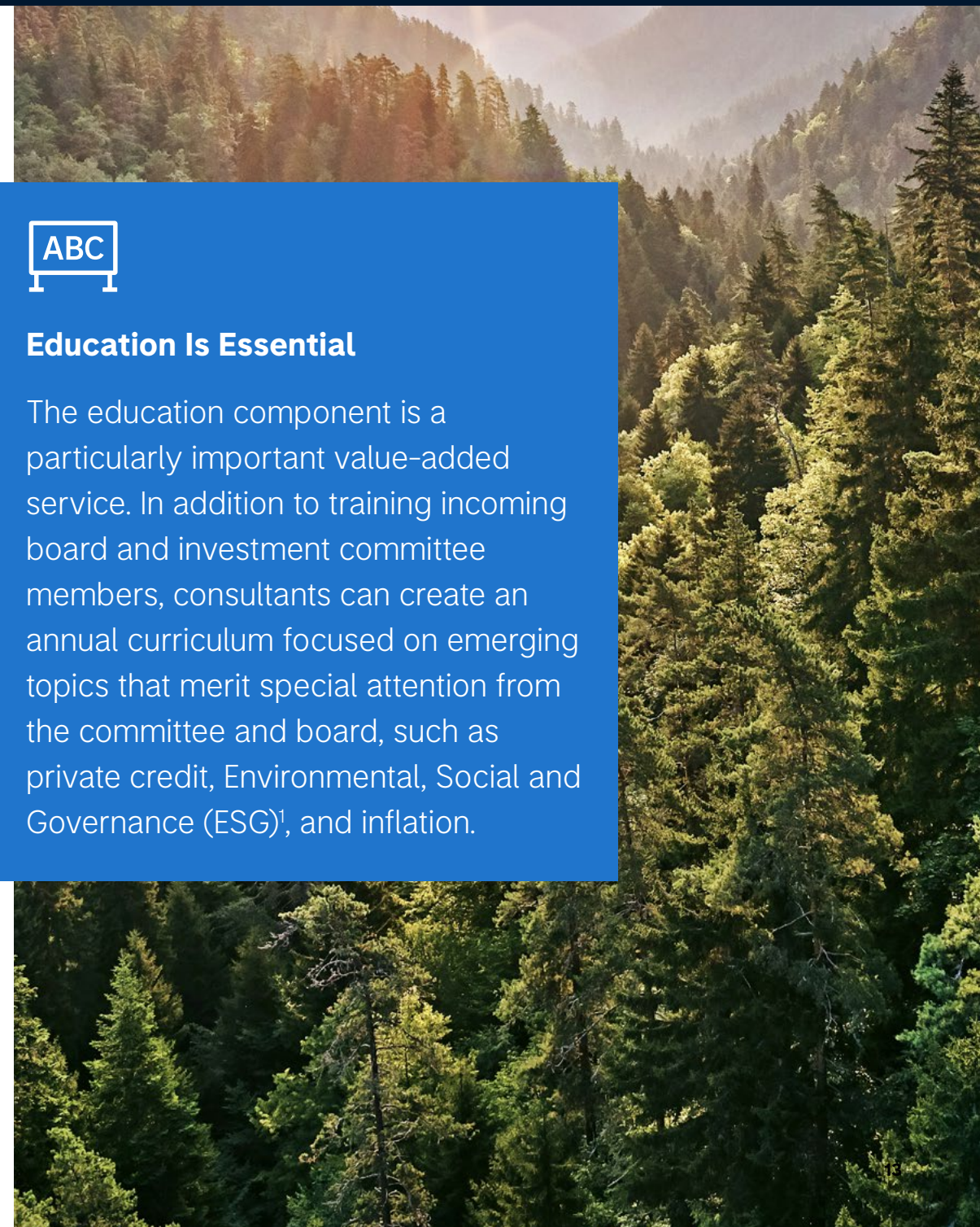
Performance
Monitoring and
Reporting

Spending Policy
Analysis



Education Is Essential

The education component is a particularly important value-added service. In addition to training incoming board and investment committee members, consultants can create an annual curriculum focused on emerging topics that merit special attention from the committee and board, such as private credit, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG)¹, and inflation.



Ability to Be Responsive and Nimble

An important trend in non-profit portfolio management is having the capability to act quickly to capitalize on new opportunities or respond to emerging threats.

If a board is meeting quarterly, the three-month gaps between meetings may cause the organization to miss out on opportunities that have shorter investment windows, which can often be the case with private equity and other non-public investments.

This desire to be nimbler in execution is another reason why many organizations are moving toward hybrid engagement models with consultants or empowering investment committees with more latitude to make tactical decisions without getting board approval.

Customization Capabilities

Investment committees should evaluate a consultant's ability to customize portfolios, reporting and other offerings to meet the organization's unique needs.

Granting full discretion to the consultant can be particularly appealing for many organizations, but not all OCIO platforms are created equal. Many are built for scale, which limits their ability to provide customized portfolios or other services for organizations.

This lack of customization can be particularly problematic for organizations focused on mission-aligned investing. High-level ESG screening likely won't fully reflect the organization's unique values and mission, and these approaches can't capitalize on investments that expand the organization's broader impact.

Elevating the Effectiveness of Your Investment Committee

An effective investment committee is essential to the success of any non-profit organization. Given the increasing complexity and volatility of financial markets, it is vital to have an investment committee that—along with its consultants and managers—has the investment knowledge and structure needed to navigate today’s markets.

It is just as important to find the right people to serve on the investment committee and to set them up for success by fostering a culture of engagement, accountability and continuing education.

At Graystone Consulting, we are committed to partnering with non-profit organizations to provide the customized advice, counsel and service they need to be effective stewards of the organization’s capital.

Global Resources With Local Experience

At Graystone Consulting, we combine local experience and global resources to help your organization make informed, confident investment decisions.



**\$868
BILLION**

in total institutional assets under management²



**50+
YEARS**

of experience advising institutional clients



**~1,800
CONSULTANTS**

serving institutional clients



Let's Talk

We look forward to starting the conversation about how we can help.

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IMPORTANT DISCLOSURE

¹ Environmental, Social and Governance (“ESG”) investments in a portfolio may experience performance that is lower or higher than a portfolio not employing such practices. Portfolios with ESG restrictions and strategies as well as ESG investments may not be able to take advantage of the same opportunities or market trends as portfolios where ESG criteria is not applied. There are inconsistent ESG definitions and criteria within the industry, as well as multiple ESG ratings providers that provide ESG ratings of the same subject companies and/or securities that vary among the providers. Certain issuers of investments may have differing and inconsistent views concerning ESG criteria where the ESG claims made in offering documents or other literature may overstate ESG impact. ESG designations are as of the date of this material, and no assurance is provided that the underlying assets have maintained or will maintain any such designation or any stated ESG compliance.

As a result, it is difficult to compare ESG investment products or to evaluate an ESG investment product in comparison to one that does not focus on ESG. Investors should also independently consider whether the ESG investment product meets their own ESG objectives or criteria.

There is no assurance that an ESG investing strategy or techniques employed will be successful. Past performance is not a guarantee or a dependable measure of future results.

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² Information as of December 31, 2025. Mandates include all Assets Under Management and Assets Under Advisement.

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