



# Corporate Governance Principles and Proxy Voting Guidelines

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Fiscal Year 2023-2024

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## About the SBA

The State Board of Administration (SBA) of Florida is an agency of Florida state government that provides a variety of investment services to governmental entities. The SBA has three Trustees: The Governor, as Chairman, the Chief Financial Officer, as Treasurer, and the Attorney General, as Secretary. All three of the Trustees of the Board are elected statewide to their respective positions as Governor, Chief Financial Officer, and Attorney General. SBA Trustees are dedicated to ensuring that the SBA invests assets and discharges its duties in accordance with Florida law, guided by strict policies and a code of ethics to ensure integrity, prudent risk management and top-tier performance. The Board of Trustees appoints nine members to serve on the Investment Advisory Council (IAC). The IAC provides independent oversight of SBA's funds and major investment responsibilities.

The SBA is an investment fiduciary under law, and subject to the stringent fiduciary duties and standards of care defined by the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA), as incorporated into Florida law.

The SBA strives to meet the highest ethical, fiduciary, and professional standards while performing its mission, with a continued emphasis on keeping operating and investment management costs as low as possible for the benefit of Florida taxpayers.

### General Inquiries:

1801 Hermitage Blvd., Suite 100

Tallahassee, FL 32308

Phone: +850-488-4406

Fax: +850-413-1255

Email: [governance@sbafla.com](mailto:governance@sbafla.com)

Website: [www.sbafla.com](http://www.sbafla.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

The State Board of Administration (SBA) of Florida manages one of the largest U.S. pension funds and other non-pension trust funds with assets spanning domestic and international capital markets. Our primary function is to represent the interests of our beneficiaries so that they will see fair returns on their investment; therefore, we have a clear interest in promoting the success of companies in which we invest. To ensure returns for our beneficiaries, we support the adoption of internationally recognized governance structures for public companies. This includes a basic and unabridged set of shareowner rights, strong independent boards, performance-based executive compensation, accurate accounting and audit practices, and transparent board procedures and policies covering issues such as succession planning and meaningful shareowner participation. All proposals are evaluated through a common lens by considering both how the proposal might impact the company's financial health as well as its impact on shareowner rights.

### Corporate Governance Principles

The SBA believes that, as a long-term investor, good corporate governance practices serve to protect and enhance our long-term portfolio values.<sup>1</sup> In furtherance of this, and in accordance with Section 112.662, Florida Statutes, when deciding whether to exercise shareholder rights or when exercising such rights, including the voting of proxies, only pecuniary factors may be considered and the interests of the participants and beneficiaries may not be subordinated to other objectives, including sacrificing investment return or undertaking additional investment risk to promote any nonpecuniary factor. The term "pecuniary factor" means a factor that the plan administrator, named fiduciary, board, or board of trustees prudently determines is expected to have a material effect on the risk or returns of an investment based on appropriate investment horizons consistent with the investment objectives and funding policy of the retirement system or plan. The term does not include the consideration of the furtherance of any social, political, or ideological interests.

Other regulations affecting proxy voting are: 1) the U.S. Securities & Exchange Commission's (SEC) Rule 206(4)-6 under the Investment Advisers Act, promulgated in 2003, and 2) the Department of Labor (DOL) —Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA) rule, "Prudence and Loyalty in Selecting Plan Investments and Exercising Shareholder Rights," most recently modified and effective in early 2023. This SEC Rule made it, "fraudulent for an investment adviser to exercise proxy voting authority without having procedures reasonably designed to ensure that the adviser votes in the best interest of its clients. In the rule's adopting release, the SEC confirmed that an adviser owes fiduciary duties of care and loyalty to its clients with respect to all services undertaken on its client's behalf, including proxy voting."<sup>2</sup> The adopting release states, "The duty of care requires an adviser with proxy voting authority to monitor corporate events and to vote the proxies. To satisfy its duty of loyalty, the adviser must cast the proxy votes in a manner consistent with the best interest of its clients and must not subrogate client interests for its own."<sup>3</sup> DOL regulation recognizes that when a plan's assets include shares of stock, the fiduciary duty to manage plan assets includes the management of shareholder rights related to those shares, such as the right to vote proxies. Under this guidance, proxy voting should be treated like any other financial asset, executed in the best interest of beneficiaries in accordance with written guidelines.<sup>4</sup> However, these sources of legal authority are persuasive, and in the event of any conflict between Florida law and any such persuasive legal authority, Florida law prevails.

Managing stock ownership rights and the proxy vote includes the establishment of written proxy voting guidelines, which must include voting policies on issues likely to be presented, procedures for determining votes that are not covered or which present conflicts of interest for plan sponsor fiduciaries, procedures for ensuring that all shares held on record date are voted, and procedures for documentation of voting records. The following corporate governance principles and proxy voting guidelines are primarily designed to cover publicly traded equity securities. Other investment forms, such as privately held equity, limited liability corporations, privately held REITs, etc., are not specifically covered by individual guidelines, although broad application of the principles and guidelines can be used for these more specialized forms of equity investments.

<sup>1</sup> CFA Centre for Financial Market Integrity, "The Corporate Governance of Listed Companies: A Manual for Investors," 2009.

<sup>2</sup> The Conference Board, "The Separation of Ownership from Ownership," 2013.

<sup>3</sup> "Proxy Voting by Investment Advisers," SEC Final Rule adopted January 31, 2003, effective April 14, 2003; [www.sec.gov/rules/final/ia-2106.htm](http://www.sec.gov/rules/final/ia-2106.htm).

<sup>4</sup> 29 CFR § 2550.404a-1(d) - Investment duties.

The primary role of shareowners within the corporate governance system is in some ways limited, although critical. Shareowners have the duty to communicate with management and encourage them to align their processes with corporate governance best practices. This means shareowners have two primary obligations: 1) to monitor the performance of the company and 2) to protect their right to act when it is necessary.

In the 1930s, Benjamin Graham and David Dodd succinctly described the agenda for corporate governance activity by stating that shareowners should focus their attention on matters where the interest of the officer and the stockholders may be in conflict. This includes questions about preserving the full integrity and value of the characteristics of ownership appurtenant to shares of common stock. For example, the right to vote may be diluted by a classified board or by dual class capitalization, and the right to transfer the stock to a willing buyer at a mutually agreeable price may be abrogated by the adoption of a poison pill.

Since management and board composition change over time, while shareowners continue their investment, shareowners must ensure that the corporate governance structure of companies will allow them to exercise their ownership rights permanently. Good corporate management is not an excuse or rationale upon which institutional investors may relinquish their ownership rights and responsibilities.

The proxy voting system must be an even playing field. Neither management nor shareowners should be able to dominate or influence voting dynamics. A 2006 article analyzed the corporate governance implications of the decoupling of voting power and economic ownership through methods such as vote trading and equity swaps, methods largely hidden from public view and not captured by current regulation or disclosure rules. This method has been used by finance-savvy activist hedge funds, for example, who have borrowed shares just before the record date to better support proposals they favor, reversing the transactions after the record date. The SBA believes that enhanced disclosure rules are critical to reveal hidden control of voting power.<sup>5</sup>

Management needs protection from the market's frequent focus on the short-term to concentrate on long-term returns, productivity, and competitiveness. Shareowners need protection from coercive takeover tactics and directors with personal agendas. Ideal governance provisions should provide both sides with adequate protection. They should be designed to give management the flexibility and continuity it needs to make long-term plans, to permit takeover bids in cases where management performance is depressing long-term value, to ensure that management is accountable to shareowners, and to prevent coercive offers that force shareowners to take limited short-term gains.

A study on shareowner activism and corporate governance in the United States found that shareowner opposition has slowed the spread of takeover defenses, such as staggered boards, that require shareowner approval. However, shareowners have failed in their efforts to get companies to roll back takeover defenses and, perhaps more importantly, managers frequently ignore even a majority shareowner vote in favor of a proposal.<sup>6</sup>

### **Global Standards of Corporate Governance**

The SBA believes strongly that good corporate governance practices are important to encourage investments in countries and companies in a globalized economy where gaining access to capital markets is increasingly viewed as critical. Empirical evidence demonstrates the relationship between corporate valuation and corporate governance structures, finding that foreign institutional investors invested lower amounts in firms with higher insider control, lower transparency, and are domiciled in countries with weak investor protections.<sup>7</sup> A comparative analysis of corporate governance in US and international firms shows

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<sup>5</sup> Hu, Henry T.C. and Black, Bernard S., "Empty Voting and Hidden (Morphable) Ownership: Taxonomy, Implications, and Reforms". As published in *Business Lawyer*, Vol. 61, pp. 1011-1070, 2006 Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=887183>. Also, Christoffersen, S.E.K., Geczy, C.C., Musto, D.K., and Reed, A.V. 2006, "Vote Trading and Information Aggregation."

<sup>6</sup> Black, B., 1998. "Shareowner Activism and Corporate Governance in the United States."

<sup>7</sup> Christian Leuz, Karl V. Lins, and Francis E. Warnock, "Do Foreigners Invest Less in Poorly Governed Firms?" *The Review of Financial Studies*, 22 (2009).

that the ability of controlling shareowners to extract private benefits is strongly determined by a country's investor protection. Thus, if investor protection is weaker, improvements in firm-level governance will be costlier for the controlling shareowner.<sup>8</sup>

Many countries, international organizations, and prominent institutional investors have developed and implemented international policies on corporate governance and proxy voting issues (e.g., the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the International Corporate Governance Network).<sup>9</sup> Many of these promulgated guidelines recognize that each country need not adopt a "one-size-fits-all" code of practice. However, SBA expects all capital markets to exhibit basic and fundamental structures that include the following:

### 1. Corporate Objective

The overriding objective of the corporation should be to maximize the returns to its shareowners over time. Where other considerations affect this objective, they should be clearly stated and disclosed. To achieve this objective, the corporation should endeavor to ensure the long-term viability of its business.

### 2. Communications & Reporting

Corporations should disclose accurate, adequate, and timely information, in particular meeting market guidelines where they exist, to allow investors to make informed decisions about the acquisition, ownership obligations and rights, and sale of shares. Material developments and foreseeable risk factors, and matters related to corporate governance should be routinely disseminated to shareowners. Shareowners, the board, and management should discuss corporate governance issues. Where appropriate, these parties should converse with government and regulatory representatives, as well as other concerned bodies, to resolve disputes, if possible, through negotiation, mediation, or arbitration. For example, investors should have the right to sponsor resolutions and convene extraordinary meetings. Formal procedures outlining how shareowners can communicate with board members should be implemented at all companies and be clearly disclosed.

### 3. Voting Rights

Corporations' ordinary shares should feature one vote for each share. Corporations should act to ensure the owners' rights to vote and apply this principle to all shareowners regardless of their size. Shareowners should be able to vote in person or in absentia, and equal effect should be given to votes whether cast in person or absentia. Votes should be cast by custodians or nominees, in a manner agreed upon with the beneficial owner of the shares. Impediments to cross border voting should be eliminated. Minority shareholders should be protected from abusive actions by, or in the interest of, controlling shareholders acting either directly or indirectly and should have effective means of redress.<sup>10</sup>

### 4. Corporate Boards

The Board of Directors, or Supervisory Board, as an entity, and each of its members, as individuals, is a fiduciary for all shareowners, and they should be accountable to the shareowner body as a whole. Each member should stand for election on a regular basis, preferably with annual election cycles. Corporations should disclose upon appointment to the board, and thereafter in each annual report or proxy statement, information on the identities, core competencies, professional or other backgrounds, factors affecting independence, other commitments, and overall qualifications of board members and nominees to enable investors to weigh the value that they add to the company. Information on the appointment procedure should also be disclosed annually. Boards should include a sufficient number of independent, non-executive members with appropriate qualifications. Responsibilities should include monitoring and contributing effectively to the strategy and performance of management, staffing key committees of the board, and influencing the conduct of the board. Accordingly, independent non-executives should comprise no fewer than three (3) members and as much as a substantial majority. Audit, Compensation and Nomination committees should be composed entirely of independent non-executives.

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<sup>8</sup> Aggraval, Reena et al, 2007, "Differences in Governance Practices between US and Foreign Firms: Measurement, Causes, and Consequences", Charles A. Dice Center for Research in Financial Economics, Working Paper 2007-14.

<sup>9</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD), "Corporate Governance Factbook," 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD), Role of Institutional Investors in Promoting Good Corporate Governance, January 11, 2012.

## 5. Executive & Director Compensation

Remuneration of corporate directors or supervisory board members and key executives should be aligned with the interests of shareowners. Corporations should disclose in each annual report or proxy statement the board's policies on remuneration and, preferably, the remuneration of individual board members and top executives; so that shareowners can judge whether corporate pay policies and practices meet this standard. Broad-based employee share ownership plans, or other profit-sharing programs are effective market mechanisms that promote employee participation.

## 6. Strategic Planning

Major strategic modifications to the core business of a corporation should not be made without prior shareowner approval of the proposed modification. Equally, major corporate changes that, in substance or effect, materially dilute the equity or erode the economic interests or share ownership rights of existing shareowners should not be made without prior shareowner approval of the proposed change. Shareowners should be given sufficient information about any such proposal early enough to allow them to make an informed judgment and exercise their voting rights.

## 7. Voting Responsibilities

The exercise of ownership rights by all shareowners, including institutional investors should be facilitated. Institutional investors acting in a fiduciary capacity should disclose their overall corporate governance and voting policies with respect to their investments, including the procedures that they have in place for deciding on the use of their voting rights. Institutional investors acting in a fiduciary capacity should disclose how they manage material conflicts of interest that may affect the exercise of key ownership rights regarding their investments. Shareowners, including institutional investors, should be allowed to consult with each other on issues concerning their basic shareowner rights, subject to exceptions to prevent abuse. The corporate governance framework should be complemented by an effective approach that addresses and promotes the provision of analysis or advice by analysts, brokers, rating agencies, and others that is relevant to decisions by investors, free from material conflicts of interest that might compromise the integrity of their analysis or advice.

## Pecuniary Factors

In accordance with Section 112.662, Florida Statutes, when deciding whether to exercise shareholder rights or when exercising such rights, including the voting of proxies, only pecuniary factors may be considered and the interests of the participants and beneficiaries may not be subordinated to other objectives, including sacrificing investment return or undertaking additional investment risk to promote any nonpecuniary factor. The term "pecuniary factor" means a factor that the plan administrator, named fiduciary, board, or board of trustees prudently determines is expected to have a material effect on the risk or returns of an investment based on appropriate investment horizons consistent with the investment objectives and funding policy of the retirement system or plan. The term does not include the consideration of the furtherance of any social, political, or ideological interests.

## Active Strategies & Company Engagement

The objective of SBA corporate governance engagement is to improve the governance structures at companies in which the SBA owns significant shares to enhance the value of SBA equity holdings.

A study on the evolution of shareowner activism in the United States affirms that activism by investors has increased considerably since the mid-1980s due to the involvement of public pension funds and institutional shareowners. The study identifies the potential to enhance value of investments as the main motive for active participation in the monitoring of corporations. However, as shareowner activism entails concentrated costs and widely disbursed benefits, only investors with large positions are likely to obtain a large enough return on their investment to justify the costs.<sup>11</sup>

The two primary obligations of shareowners are to monitor the performance of the companies and to protect their right to act when necessary. The SBA has neither the time nor resources to micromanage companies in which it holds publicly traded stock.

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<sup>11</sup> Gillan, Stuart L. and Laura T. Starks, 2007, "The Evolution of Shareowner Activism in the United States", Journal of Applied Corporate Finance, Volume 19, Number 1, Winter 2007, Published by Morgan Stanley.

Furthermore, the legal duties of care and loyalty rest with the corporate Board of Directors, not with the shareowners. For these reasons, the SBA views its role as one of fostering improved management and accountability within the companies in which we own shares. Other recent SBA corporate governance activities have included dealing with conflicts of interest within organizations with which we do business.

Voting proxies is a fiduciary responsibility, and proxies should be treated like any other financial asset, executed in the best interest of beneficiaries and not for the furtherance of any social, political or ideological interests. Florida Law may prohibit investment in companies or mandate reporting on certain investments due to geopolitical, ethnic, religious, or other factors. Compliance with these laws and any related reporting requirements have similarities to corporate governance issues and are consolidated organizationally.

Consistent with prudent and responsible investment policy, all or some of the following measures may be instituted when a corporation is found by the SBA to be under-performing market indices or in need of corporate governance reform:

- The SBA will discuss the corporate governance deficiencies with a representative and/or the Board of Directors. Deficiencies may occur in the form of policies or actions, and often result from the failure to adopt policies that sufficiently protect shareowner assets or rights. The SBA may request to be informed of the progress in ameliorating such deficiencies.
- Under SEC Rule 14(a) 8, shareowner proposals may be submitted to companies with identified performance deficiencies. Shareowners' proposals will be used to place significant issues on a company's meeting ballot to allow all shareowners to approve or disapprove of significant issues and voice the collective displeasure of company owners.<sup>12</sup>
- Any other strategies to achieve desired corporate governance improvements as necessary.

Investor engagement can be classified into three categories, including "Extensive," "Moderate," and "Basic." Extensive engagement is defined as multiple instances of focused interaction with a company on issues identified with a view to changing the company's behavior. The engagements were systematic and begun with a clear goal in mind. Moderate engagement is defined as more than one interaction with a company on issues identified. The engagement was somewhat systematic, but the specific desired outcome may not have been clear at the outset. Basic engagement is defined as direct contact with companies, but engagement tended to be ad-hoc and reactive. Such engagement may not have pursued the issue beyond the initial contact with the company and includes supporting letters authored by other investors or groups.

In addition to overseeing the corporate governance of companies in which we invest, the SBA must also govern the accessibility of our own records by these companies. As a beneficial owner of over 10,000 publicly traded companies, the SBA has elected to be an objecting beneficial owner, or an "OBO." By being an OBO, the SBA does not give permission to a financial intermediary to release our name and address to public companies that we are invested in. This keeps our holdings or trading strategies confidential and allows us to avoid unwanted solicitations.

Recent developments have led many to believe that the distinction between OBO and non-objecting beneficial owners or "NOBOs" should be eliminated. However, the SEC is likely to be cautious in seeking to change the current framework in significant ways.<sup>13</sup> Strong opponents to an elimination of OBO and NOBO distinction are brokers and banks, who have a large incentive to ward off this change due to fee income derived from forwarding proxy materials.

While shareowner communication can be very important, steps must be taken to address the distinction between OBO and NOBO companies and to respect the privacy of beneficial owners involved. Proposals that eliminate the possibility of anonymity are not supported. It is necessary for any changes made to the current system to accommodate the strong privacy interests of current OBO firms, such as SBA.

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<sup>12</sup> Rule 14a-8 is an SEC rulemaking promulgated under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 and offers a set of procedural requirements governing how and when shareowners may submit resolutions for inclusion in a corporation's proxy statement.

<sup>13</sup> Beller, Alan L. and Janet L. Fisher. "The OBO/NOBO Distinction in Beneficial Ownership: Implications for Shareowner Communications and Voting." Council of Institutional Investors. February 2010.

### Disclosure of Proxy Voting Decisions

SBA discloses all proxy voting decisions once they have been made, typically a few calendar days prior to the date of the shareowner meeting. Disclosing proxy votes prior to the meeting date improves the transparency of our voting decisions. Historical proxy votes are available electronically on the SBA's website.<sup>14</sup>

### Proxy Voting and Securities Lending

SBA participates in securities lending to enhance the return on its investment portfolios. In the process of lending securities, the legal rights attached to those shares are transferred to the borrower of the securities during the period that the securities are on loan. As a result, SBA's right to exercise proxy voting on loaned securities is forfeited unless those affected shares have been recalled from the borrower in a timely manner (i.e., on, or prior to, the share's record date). SBA has a fiduciary duty to exercise its right to vote proxies and to recall shares on loan when it is in the best interest of our beneficiaries. The ability to vote in corporate meetings is an asset of the fund which needs to be weighed against the incremental returns of the securities lending program.

Although SBA shall reserve the right to recall the shares on a timely basis prior to the record date for the purpose of exercising voting rights for domestic as well as international securities, the circumstances required to recall loaned securities are expected to be atypical. Circumstances that lead SBA to recall shares include, but are not limited to, occasions when there are significant voting items on the ballot such as mergers or proxy contests or instances when SBA has actively pursued coordinated efforts to reform the company's governance practices, such as submission of shareholder proposals or conducting an extensive engagement. In each case, the direct monetary impact of recalled shares will be considered and weighed against the discernible benefits of recalling shares to exercise voting rights. However, because companies are not required to disclose an upcoming meeting and its agenda items in advance of the record date, it usually is not possible to recall shares on loan.

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<sup>14</sup> Reporting is publicly available at [www.sbafla.com](http://www.sbafla.com), including real time voting decisions prior to shareowner meetings.



## THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Of the voting items that come before shareowners, the matters of the board and its operation are the most pivotal. Shareowners must be able to elect and maintain a board of directors whose main charge is to monitor management on the behalf of shareowners, but who will also sufficiently heed majority shareowner input on matters of substantial importance. These voting items concern the election of the board members, as well as chairmanship and committee service, and the processes that govern the frequency, setting and outcome of elections. The nominees' qualifications, performance, and overall contribution to the board skillset are of great importance to shareowners casting votes on the elections of individuals, particularly in cases of proxy contests.

SBA votes with the intent of electing candidates who are qualified and able to effectively contribute, and we support election processes that allow shareowners in the aggregate to exercise meaningful control over who may serve as board members and under what circumstances. We favor transparent election procedures and structures that sufficiently allow for shareowners to elect and consequently hold directors accountable for their performance.

### ELECTION OF DIRECTORS: CASE-BY-CASE

Director elections are of the most important voting decisions that shareowners make. Directors function as the representatives of shareowners and serve a critical role in monitoring management. The SBA generally considers a nominee's qualifications, relevant industry experience, independence, performance, and overall contribution to the board when assessing election votes.<sup>15</sup> At the board level, we consider the applicability of differing backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge, and other appropriate categories. In cases where a proxy contest has resulted in more nominees than available board seats, it's important to assess each candidate's relative expertise and experience, as well as differences in strategic vision if applicable.

The SBA may vote against (i.e., "withhold" support for) director nominees for one or more of the following reasons:

**Poor performance or oversight in duties of the board or board committees** – including poor performance in board service at other public companies. Board members exhibiting poor performance may have failed to appropriately monitor or discipline management in cases where failed strategies continue to be implemented or when the board refuses to consider views from a large majority of shareowners, analysts, and market participants. In the case of a breakdown of proper board oversight, SBA is likely to vote against all or most members of the board, and in cases where a dissident has launched a proxy contest, SBA may be supportive of the dissident nominees if they present with appropriate qualifications and strategies, as discussed below. Shareowners sometimes target under-performing directors through "vote no" campaigns. An empirical study found that "vote no" campaigns are an effective tool to voice concerns with a particular director and often successfully pressure the company to act.<sup>16</sup> This underscores that performance is an essential component of governance and should be considered when evaluating director elections.

Boards are expected to conduct internal and external evaluations of their own functioning to assess how well they are performing their responsibilities.<sup>17</sup> These evaluations can be particularly helpful for committees as well, such as in assessing audit committee performance. The audit committee is responsible for independent oversight of the company's financial statements and, in the absence of a separate risk committee, is also often responsible for risk oversight.<sup>18</sup> Regular self-assessments are critical to a productive audit committee. The SBA will consider the audit committee's

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<sup>15</sup> The SBA generally does not consider age as a rationale for withholding votes. Length of service on a board is sometimes a factor in determining independence for a director but is not used to justify a withhold vote except in rare instances with unusual circumstances. See the guideline for "Limits on board service".

<sup>16</sup> Diane Del Guercio, Laura Seery, and Tracie Woidtke, "Do Boards Pay Attention when Institutional Investor Activists 'Just Vote No,'" available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=575242>. The study finds a forced CEO turnover rate of 25 percent in firms targeted with "vote no" campaigns.

<sup>17</sup> A paper by the Global Corporate Governance Forum recommends using board evaluations as open communication to focus on inadequacies, identify strategic priorities and become more efficient through the review of policies and procedures [GCGF, Board Performance Evaluation].

<sup>18</sup> SEC Rule 10A-3 under the Exchange Act mandates that stock exchanges adopt listing standards that require that each member of the audit committee of a listed company has (1) not received compensation from the issuer other than for board services and (2) is not an "affiliated person" of the issuer that either controls, is controlled by, or is under common control with the issuer.

performance, especially as it relates to oversight and risk management, when voting on individual committee members. Evidence of poor audit committee performance are financial restatements, including as a result of option backdating, unremediated material weaknesses, and attempts to limit auditor liability through auditor engagement contracts. The severity, breadth, chronological sequence and duration of financial restatements, and the company's efforts at remediation will be examined in determining whether withhold votes are warranted.

Likewise, the function of the nominating and governance committees will be assessed by considering how the committees have approached implementation of governance rules and the impact on shareowners' rights, particularly in cases of bylaw amendments or votes on shareowner and management proposals. When a company goes public with a dual or multi-class share structure without a sunset provision on unequal voting rights such as in the case of an IPO or spinoff, SBA may withhold votes from or vote against directors. Bylaws that create supermajority voting thresholds or limit shareowner rights are generally undesirable but depends on the context of the individual company. This committee also is responsible for board nominations, and SBA judges this function by the qualifications of the nominees. This committee should try to seek candidates that are diversified not only in backgrounds, experience and knowledge, but in all other aspects appropriate for the individual company and should disclose these efforts to shareowners.

Members of the compensation committee are judged in accordance with the aspects of the compensation philosophy, plan, and implementation. Compensation that is out of line with respect to magnitude, peers, or performance is problematic, as are plans that reward compensation without appropriate performance-based conditions or feature undesirable elements such as gross-ups or single-trigger severance packages.

We may withhold support for individual directors if there are indications that directors are failing or failed to understand company risk exposures and/or take reasonable steps to mitigate the effects of the risk, leading to large losses.

**Restricting shareowner rights or failing to sufficiently act on shareowner input** – such as ignoring a shareowner proposal that received majority support of votes cast or attempting to block or limit the ability of shareowners to file precatory or binding proposals or adopt or amend bylaws.

**Serving on too many boards ("over-boarding")** – generally a director who serves on more than 3 company boards and who is employed in a full-time position.<sup>19</sup> Directors with significant outside responsibilities such as serving as CEO of a public company should not exceed one external board membership.<sup>20</sup> Surveys of directors have indicated that the average board membership requires over 250 hours of active, committed work, making service on multiple boards difficult for executives, particularly CEOs, and leading to many investors embracing similar limits as the SBA. When seeking to improve board composition, boards should choose well-qualified candidates who are not already committed to serving as a director on more than three boards.

**Poor attendance at meetings without just cause** – less than 75 percent attendance rate.

**Lack of independence** – most markets should have independent board representation that meets a minimum two thirds threshold. Independence is defined as having no business, financial or personal affiliation with the firm other than being a member of its board of directors. Directors or nominees that are affiliated with outside companies that conduct business with the company, have significant outside links to senior management, were previously employed by the company or are engaged directly or indirectly in related-party transactions are highly likely to be considered non-independent, depending

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<sup>19</sup> See Fich, Eliezer M. and Anil Shivdasani, 2006, "Are Busy Boards Effective Monitors?," The Journal of Finance, Vol. 61, No. 2, pp. 689-724 (36), Blackwell Publishing. This study of U.S. industrial firms between 1989 and 1995, found that when a majority of outside directors serve on three or more boards, firms exhibit lower market-to-book ratios, as well as weaker operating profitability. When a majority of outside directors are over boarded, the sensitivity of CEO turnover to performance is significantly lower than when a majority of outside directors are not busy. Investors react positively to the departure of over boarded directors, while firms, whose directors acquire an additional board seat and become over boarded, end up experiencing negative abnormal returns.

<sup>20</sup> Neil Roland, "Directors at troubled companies overbooked, research firm claims" Financial Week, February 25, 2009. This article gives examples of over-boarding problems at struggling U.S. financial institutions. State Board of Administration (SBA) of Florida, "Time is Money," study on over-boarded directors and company performance, 2018.

on the materiality of the circumstances. At controlled companies (where an investor controls a majority of a firm's equity capital); support may be withheld from directors at boards with less than a one-third proportion of independent directors.

Boards without adequate independence from management may suffer from conflicts of interest and impaired judgment in their decision-making. In addition to poor transparency, directors with ties to management may be perceived to be less willing and able to effectively evaluate and scrutinize company strategy and performance. SBA scrutinizes management nominees to the board, because of the conflict of interest inherent in serving on the board, which in turn is charged with overseeing the performance of senior management. In most markets, we support the CEO of the company as the only reasonable management team member to serve on the board.

**Lack of disclosures** – because there are differences in each market as to disclosures and voting procedures for director elections, SBA considers practices in the local market, but does not compromise on fundamental tenets such as the right to elect individual directors (as opposed to a slate as a whole) and the need for proof that director candidates can provide independent oversight of management. Global markets increasingly depend on the homogenization of better governance standards to increase shareowner value and liquidity in emerging markets. The protection of fundamental voting rights may be at odds with local market customs in the short run<sup>21</sup>, but through voting the SBA aims to encourage companies to adopt minimum-level best practices throughout the portfolio of holdings.

In certain markets where the quality and depth of disclosures about the nominees are less than desirable, we work with other investors to advocate for improvements in these markets as a matter of course. In a few markets, the directors may be proposed as a group in a single bundled voting item, preventing a vote on each director, which is considered a very poor practice in developed economies.

When nominees are bundled or insufficient information is disclosed, we typically oppose the item. When appropriate information is disclosed, we make voting decisions based on the qualifications of the nominee, the performance of the nominee on this or other boards, if applicable, and the needs of the board considering the other nominees' overall skillset.

**Minimal or no stock ownership** – regarding industry or market peers. Companies should adopt a policy covering stock ownership for directors and annually review compliance among members. Certain markets have laws prohibiting ownership or discourage ownership among directors as a potential conflict of interest, so SBA is more nuanced in assessing directors on these markets.

Proxy contests are less typical election events, only occurring in a small fraction of director elections, but require shareowners to judge between competing views of strategic direction for the company. When analyzing proxy contests, the SBA focuses on two central questions: (1) Have the dissidents demonstrated that change is warranted at the company, and if so, (2) will the dissidents be better able to affect such change versus the incumbent board?

When dissidents seek board control with a majority of nominees, they face a high burden of proof and must provide a well-reasoned and detailed business plan, including the dissidents' strategic initiatives, a transition plan that describes how the dissidents will affect change in control, and the identification of a qualified and credible new management team. The SBA compares the detailed dissident plan against the incumbents' plan and compares the dissidents' proposed board and management team against the incumbent team.

Usually dissidents run a "short slate", which seeks to place just a few nominees on the board, not a majority. In these cases, the SBA places a lower burden of proof on the dissidents. In such cases, the SBA's policy does not necessarily require the dissidents to provide a detailed plan of action or proof that its plan is preferable to the incumbent plan. Instead, the dissidents must prove

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<sup>21</sup> For instance, Italy amended its "Consolidated Financial Act" to mandate that Italian issuers reserve a certain number of board seats for candidates presented by minority shareowners. This mandate affects Board of Director elections, Supervisory Board elections, and Board of Statutory Auditor elections. See, "Italian Issuers-Guidelines for the election of the Board of Directors (or Supervisory Board) or Board of Statutory Auditors," Trevisan & Associati February 19, 2009, available at [http://www.trevisanlaw.it/en\\_mask.html?5](http://www.trevisanlaw.it/en_mask.html?5) (last visited March 2, 2009).

that change is preferable to the status quo and that the dissident slate will add value to board deliberations, including by considering the issues from a viewpoint different from current management, among other factors.

#### PROXY ACCESS: FOR

Proxy access is an important mechanism for shareowners with substantial holdings to nominate directors directly in the company's proxy materials. Generally, we support proposals that have reasonable share ownership (3% or less) and holding history (three years or less) requirements, allow shareowners to aggregate holdings for joint nominations (permitting groups of at least 20 shareowners), cap the number of shareowner nominees at the greater of two or at least 20% of the board seats, and feature other procedural elements that are not unduly burdensome on shareowners seeking to make nominations. The SBA may vote against proposals which contain burdensome or otherwise restrictive requirements, such as ownership or holding thresholds which are set at impractical levels.

#### SEPARATE CHAIRMAN & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER (CEO): CASE-BY-CASE

Because the board's main responsibility is to monitor management on behalf of shareowners, it is generally desirable for the chairman of the board to be an independent director, as opposed to the current CEO or a non-independent director such as a former CEO. Most academic evidence concludes that there is more benefit to shareowners when the chair is an independent director.<sup>22</sup> SBA typically supports proposals to provide for an independent board chairman; however, in certain cases where strong performance and governance provisions are evident, SBA may support the status quo of a serving combined CEO and chairman.

When considering whether to support a separate CEO and chairman proposal, SBA considers factors such as if there is a designated, independent lead director with the authority to develop and set the agenda for meetings and to lead sessions outside the presence of the executive chair, as well as short and long-term corporate performance on an absolute and peer-relative basis. To maintain board accountability, the SBA will not endorse the combined role of CEO and chair unless there is a strong, empowered lead director, superior company performance, and exemplary governance practices in other areas such as shareowner rights and executive compensation.

#### MAJORITY VOTING FOR DIRECTOR ELECTIONS: FOR

Proxy contests are rare; most elections feature uncontested elections where the number of directors nominated equals the number of board seats. When plurality voting is used as the voting standard in uncontested elections, the members are guaranteed election, no matter how few shareowners supported them. The SBA supports a majority voting standard for uncontested elections because it adds the requirement that a majority of shareowners must vote for each member to be considered duly elected. We prefer for the board to make this requirement in the bylaws of the company, not as a board policy. Policies that require the board members failing to achieve majority support to offer a resignation, which in turn may or may not be accepted by the board or committee, are not acceptable alternatives to a true majority vote standard for uncontested elections.

The SBA strongly endorses the majority voting election standard for the meaningful accountability it affords shareowners and because it provides another element to the system of checks and balances of power within the corporate structure. In

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<sup>22</sup> Grinstein, Yaniv and Valles Arellano, Yearim, "Separating the CEO from the Chairman Position: Determinants and Changes after the New Corporate Governance Regulation." March 2008; Lorsch, Jay and Zelleke, Andy, "Should the CEO Be the Chairman?" MIT Sloan Management Review, 2005; Ryan Krause, Semadeni, Matthew, "Apprentice, Departure, and Demotion: An Examination of the Three Types of CEO-Board Chair Separation," Academy of Management Journal 55(6), 2012; Tonello, Matteo, John C. Wilcox, and June Eichbaum, "The Role of the Board in Turbulent Times: CEO Succession Planning." The Corporate Board, August 2009; Lucier, Chuck, Steven Wheeler, and Rolf Habbel, "The Era of the Inclusive Leader." The Corporate Board, September/October 2007; "Chairing the Board: The Case for Independent Leadership in Corporate North America," Policy Briefing No. 4, Millstein Center for Corporate Governance & Performance, Yale School of Management, 2009.

contested elections, however, plurality voting remains the most effective voting standards, so all bylaws should specify that the majority voting standard applies only to uncontested elections.

#### ANNUAL ELECTIONS / NON-CLASSIFIED BOARD: FOR

A classified, or staggered, board is one in which directors are divided into three “classes” with each director serving three-year terms. All directors on a non-classified board serve one-year terms and the entire board is re-elected each year. The SBA opposes classified boards and their provisions because we believe that annual accountability will ultimately lead to increased corporate performance. Classified boards decrease corporate accountability by protecting directors from election on an annual basis. Alternatively, the SBA supports changing from a staggered board structure to annual elections for all directors.

Studies performed by economists at the SEC and by academics support the view that classified boards are contrary to shareowner interests, showing negative effects on share value for companies that adopt classified boards.<sup>23</sup> While classified board proponents cite stability, independence, and long-term strategic risk taking as justification for staggered boards, recent research has shown little evidence of such benefits.<sup>24,25</sup>

#### REQUIRE MAJORITY OF INDEPENDENT DIRECTORS: FOR

SBA supports a majority independence requirement because shareowners are best served when the board includes a significant number of independent outside directors who will represent their interests without personal conflict. The most important role of the board is to objectively evaluate the performance of senior management, so outside directors with relevant, substantial industry qualifications are most likely to perform well in this role.

SBA considers local market practices but is likely to vote against current members if less than a majority of independent directors exists. In developed markets, we expect a supermajority of independent directors and consider a two-to-one ratio of independent directors to inside and affiliated directors to be a reasonable standard and will withhold support from individual director nominee who are not independent in those circumstances. Furthermore, SBA supports restricting service on compensation, audit, and governance/nominating committees to independent outside directors only.

#### ESTABLISH OR SET MEMBERSHIP OF BOARD COMMITTEES: CASE-BY-CASE

SBA supports the audit, compensation, and governance/nominating committees being composed solely of independent board members. Independent directors face fewer conflicts of interests and are better prepared to protect shareowner interests.<sup>26</sup>

Some proposals seek to add committees on specific issues such as risk management, sustainability issues, and even specific issues such as technology and cybersecurity. When voting on proposals suggesting the establishment of new board committees, we assess the rationale for the committee and the process for handling discussions and decisions on such topics currently in place at the company. We support formation of committees that would protect or enhance shareowner rights when the company's current practices are failing to do so adequately.

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<sup>23</sup> For example, the SEC studied the impact of 649 anti-takeover proposals submitted between 1979 and 1985. The proposals consisted of fair price provisions, institution of supermajority vote requirements, classified board proposals, and authorization of blank check preferred stock. Stocks within the group showed an average loss in value of 1.31 percent. The study also found that the proposals were most harmful when implemented at firms that have higher insider and lower institutional shareholdings.

<sup>24</sup> Faleye, Olubunmi, “Classified Boards, Stability, and Strategic Risk Taking,” *Financial Analysts Journal*, Volume 65, No. 1, 2009. Also see, Lucian A. Bebchuk, “The Myth That Insulating Boards Serves Long-Term Value,” *Columbia Law Review*, Vol. 113, October 2013 and Bebchuk, Lucian, Cohen, Alma, and Wang, Charles C.Y.; “Staggered Boards and the Wealth of Shareholders: Evidence from a Natural Experiment,” *Harvard Law School John M. Olin Center Discussion Paper No.*

<sup>25</sup> , June 2010; Gompers, Paul A., Joy L. Ishii, and Andrew Metrick, “Corporate Governance and Equity Prices,” *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. W8449*, August 2001; Bates, Thomas W., David A. Becher and Michael L. Lemmon, 2007, “Board Classification and Managerial Entrenchment from the Market for Corporate Control”, electronic copy available at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=923408>; Jiraporn, Pornsit and Yixin Liu, 2008, “Capital Structure, Staggered Boards, and Firm Value,” *Financial Analyst Journal*, Volume 64, Number 1.

<sup>26</sup> T Aggraval, Reena et al, 2007, “Differences in Governance Practices between US and Foreign Firms: Measurement, Causes, and Consequences”, Charles A. Dice Center for Research in Financial Economics, Working Paper 2007-14

In most markets, SBA expects board to have key committees such as compensation, nominating/governance, and audit committees. SBA generally encourages companies, especially financial companies, to have a standing enterprise risk management committee of the board with formal risk management oversight responsibilities.<sup>27</sup> We may withhold support for individual directors if there are indications that directors failed to understand company risk exposures and/or failed to take reasonable steps to mitigate the effects of the risk, leading to large losses.

Shareowner advisory committees may advise the board on shareowner concerns and create formal means of communication between company stockholders and company management. SBA generally supports advisory committee proposals, particularly those intended to improve poor corporate governance practices.

SBA is typically unsupportive of proposals that specify establishment of a governmental party committee (as seen in certain proposals to add a Communist party committee for Chinese or Hong Kong state-owned entities) without disclosing board decision-making processes or the respective responsibilities of the party organization and the board. Companies should disclose as much relevant information on the interaction between the company and the government party committee as possible to help shareowners understand the company's decision-making process—particularly in those circumstances where the board allows the party committee to make material decisions. SBA generally votes against such proposals as they may erode the ability of shareowner-elected directors to govern the firm and sever the ties of accountability between the board and shareowners.

#### CUMULATIVE VOTING: CASE-BY-CASE

Cumulative voting generally is useful to minority shareowners at companies where a large or controlling shareowner or block of shareowners that may act in concert (such as a family-owned company) exists. It guarantees that minority shareowners will be able to elect at least one of their preferred candidates to the board of directors, even if the candidate does not win a majority vote. In contrast, only majority shareowners are guaranteed board representation at companies without cumulative voting.

The SBA will examine proposals to adopt cumulative voting considering the company's ownership profile (particularly whether there is a majority or near majority voting block) and the presence of other governance provisions such as proxy access and majority voting election requirements that directly address the voting process. A majority vote election standard ensures board accountability in uncontested elections and in some cases mitigates the need for cumulative voting. Although majority voting is meaningful in uncontested elections, it can convolute voting outcomes in contested elections. Cumulative voting, on the other hand, is meaningful primarily in contested elections, and therefore pairs well with proxy access provisions at controlled companies.

The SBA is likely to support cumulative voting proposals at majority-controlled companies to ensure that a single shareowner or small group of shareowners is unable to control voting outcomes in full. The SBA may vote against proposals to adopt cumulative voting if the company has no large shareowner blocks that aggregate easily to majority control and has adopted a full majority voting in elections bylaw (not a resignation policy), as well as proxy access or a similar structure that proactively encourages shareowners to nominate directors to the company's ballot.

#### REIMBURSE SHAREOWNERS FOR PROXY EXPENSES: CASE-BY-CASE

SBA generally supports proposals requiring reimbursement of proxy solicitation costs for successful dissident nominees. The expenses associated with promoting incumbent directors in a proxy contest are paid by the company, and for parity, dissidents elected by shareowners should have this benefit as well.

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<sup>27</sup> In 2004, the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO) defined Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) as, "a process, effected by an entity's board of directors, management and other personnel, applied in strategy setting and across the enterprise, designed to identify potential events that may affect the entity, and manage risk to be within its risk appetite, to provide reasonable assurance regarding the achievement of entity objectives."

In some circumstances at firms with no reimbursement policy, dissidents are reimbursed only for proxy solicitation expenses if they gain control of the company and seek shareowner approval for the use of company funds to reimburse themselves for the costs of solicitation. SBA would typically support reimbursement of reasonable costs in these instances.

#### CONFIDENTIAL VOTING: FOR

SBA supports greater transparency in election tabulations and the use of independent tabulators and inspectors, and we support to concept of end-to-end vote confirmation so that shareowners can be confident that their vote was correctly cast and counted. However, we are respectful of shareowners who may prefer anonymity. In a confidential voting system, only vote tabulators and inspectors of elections may examine individual proxies and ballots—management and shareholders are given only voting totals. The SBA supports resolutions requesting that corporations adopt a policy of confidential voting combined with the use of independent vote tabulators and inspectors of elections because it is the best way to guarantee confidentiality. However, the SBA generally does not support resolutions calling for confidential voting if they lack an independent inspector requirement.

In the absence of such policies, shareowners can vote confidentially by registering their shares with third parties as objecting beneficial owners (OBOs), allowing anonymity in the voting process. In an open voting system, management can determine who has voted against its director nominees (or proposals) and then re-solicit those shareowners before the final vote count. As a result of the re-solicitation, shareowners may be pressured to change their vote. On the positive side, many companies are increasing their interactions with shareowners before the voting occurs through expanded proxy solicitation conversations and other paths of engagement.

#### MINIMUM STOCK OWNERSHIP: FOR

The SBA typically supports proposals that require directors to own a reasonable minimum amount of company stock.<sup>28</sup> The SBA will consider voting against directors who own no company stock and have served on the board for more than one year. One of the best ways for directors to align their interests with those of the shareowners is to own stock in the corporation, and since director fees are typically paid partially in stock, retention guidelines encourage long-term ownership of these shares. SBA typically expects non-employee directors to maintain ownership of a number of shares having a market value equal to five times their annual retainer.

Boards should establish a policy and annually review and identify the positions covered by directors and executives. The annual review should also provide information to shareowners on whether guidelines are met and describe any action taken for non-compliance. The guidelines should identify what compensation types may be considered as ownership and what holdings are not (such as hedged positions).

#### NOMINEE QUALIFICATIONS: CASE-BY-CASE

SBA may support proposals concerning nominee qualifications if there is justification for doing so and the criteria include reasonable limits, restrictions, or requirements.

Some boards of directors may unilaterally implement changes to their corporate bylaws or articles aimed at restricting the ability of shareowners to nominate director candidates who receive third-party compensation or payments for serving as a director candidate or for service as a director of the company. Such restrictive director qualification requirements may deter legitimate investor efforts to seek board representation via a proxy contest and could exclude highly qualified individuals from being candidates for board service. When such provisions are adopted without shareowner ratification, the SBA may withhold support from members of the full board of directors or members of the governance committee serving at the time of the bylaw

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<sup>28</sup> Executive stock ownership is covered in the executive compensation section of these guidelines.

amendment. However, SBA does support disclosure of all compensation and payments made by a third-party to nominees or directors.

#### LIMITS ON BOARD SERVICE: AGAINST

The SBA generally votes AGAINST proposals to limit the service of outside directors. While refreshing a board with new outside directors often brings in fresh ideas and a healthy mix of director experience that benefit shareowners, we do not believe arbitrary limits such as tenure limits and mandatory retirement ages are appropriate ways to achieve that goal. They preclude a board's more nuanced examination of its members' contributions and could harm shareowners' interests by preventing some experienced and knowledgeable directors from serving on the board. Age limits are a form of discrimination.

Boards of directors should evaluate director tenure as part of the analysis of a director's independence and overall performance. Some studies indicate a correlation between director tenure and firm performance. A study of companies in the U.S. found that the relationship between average director tenure and firm value was negatively correlated, but highly dependent on tenure levels over time.<sup>29</sup>

#### SET BOARD SIZE: CASE-BY-CASE

The voting decision for these proposals depends on who is making the proposal and why. On occasion, management proposals seek to limit a shareowner's ability to alter the size of the board, while at the same time, allowing management to increase or decrease the size of the board at its discretion. Corporate management argues that the purpose of such proposals is to prevent a dominant shareowner from taking control of the board by drastically increasing the number of directors and electing its own nominees to fill the newly created vacancies. Other scenarios may include a board's downsizing in response to business changes or acquisitions. The SBA generally supports such proposals when a reasonable rationale is presented for the change. We prefer a shareowner vote for any changes in board size because the directors serving are representatives of the shareowners, and they should collectively determine the size of the board. Often, state law supersedes corporate bylaws by specifying minimum and maximum board size, as well as the process governing changes in board size.

#### REQUIRE MORE NOMINEES THAN BOARD SEATS: AGAINST

SBA opposes shareowner proposals requiring two candidates per board seat. Proxy access is a preferable mechanism for shareowners to nominate directors when necessary.

#### DIRECTOR LIABILITY AND/OR INDEMNIFICATION: CASE-BY-CASE (AND ACCORDING TO STATE LAWS)

Indemnification literally means "to make whole." When a corporation indemnifies its directors and officers, the directors are covered by the company or insured by a purchased policy against certain legal expenses, damages and judgments incurred because of lawsuits relating to their corporate actions. SBA may vote in favor if the covered acts provide that a "good faith" standard was satisfied. The SBA votes against such proposals if coverage expands beyond legal expenses and applies to acts that are more serious violations of fiduciary obligation, such as negligence or violating the duty of care.

#### SUPPORT SHAREOWNER COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE BOARD: FOR

The SBA generally supports shareowners' proposals requesting that the board establish a procedure for shareowners to communicate directly with the board, such as through creating an office of the board of directors, unless the company has done all the following:

- Established a communication structure that goes beyond the exchange requirements to facilitate the exchange of information between shareowners and members of the board;
- Disclosed information with respect to this structure to its shareowners;
- Heeded majority-supported shareowner proposals or a majority withhold vote on a director nominee;

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<sup>29</sup> Huang, Sterling, "Board Tenure and Firm Performance," INSEAD Business School, May 2013.



- Established an independent chairman or a lead/presiding director. This individual must be made available for periodic consultation and direct communication with major shareowners.

#### ADOPT TWO-TIERED (SUPERVISORY/MANAGEMENT) BOARD STRUCTURE: CASE-BY-CASE

Companies in some countries have a two-tiered board structure, comprising a supervisory board of non-executive directors and a management board with executive directors. The supervisory board oversees the actions of the management board, while the management board is responsible for the company's daily operations. At companies with two-tiered boards, shareowners elect members to the supervisory board only; the supervisory board appoints management board members. In Austria, Brazil, the Czech Republic, Germany, Peru, Poland, Portugal, and Russia, two-tiered boards are the norm. They are also permitted by Company law in France and Spain.

The merits of the new structure will be weighed against the merits of the old structure in terms of its ability to represent shareowners' interests adequately, provide for optimal governance structure, and to generate higher shareowner value.

#### RATIFY ACTIONS TAKEN BY BOARD DURING PAST YEAR: CASE-BY-CASE

Many countries require that shareowners discharge the board or management for actions taken in the previous year. In most cases, discharge is a routine item and does not preclude future shareowner action if wrongdoing is discovered.<sup>30</sup> Unless there is clear evidence of negligence or action counter to shareowners' interests, the SBA will typically support the proposals. However, in the United States, given the unusual nature of discharge proposals, the SBA will typically vote against proposals that would limit the board or management from any future legal options.

#### APPROVE PROPOSED/COMPLETED TRANSACTIONS BETWEEN DIRECTORS AND COMPANY: CASE-BY-CASE

Transactions between a parent company and its subsidiary, or a company's dealings with entities that employ the company's directors, are usually classified as related-party transactions and are subject to company law or stock exchange listing requirements that mandate shareowner approval. Shareowner approval of these transactions is critical as they are meant to protect shareowners against abuses of power. Transactions should be completed at arm's length and not benefit directors and/or insiders at company or shareowners' expense. We also support reviews of director transactions by independent committees.

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<sup>30</sup> In June 2008, Manifest and Morley Fund Management analyzed governance practices in continental Europe and issued a report that emphasized the country specific implications of discharging directors. "Directors' Liability Discharge Proposals: The Implications for Shareowners" stressed that the nature and scope of directors' liabilities vary by jurisdiction. "Each market has its own rules, regulations and best practice guidelines against which informed decisions should be measured and carefully weighed." One similarity noted in the report was that "in all the markets covered by the study, a failure to grant a discharge from liability does not have an immediate effect on the liability of directors, but merely leaves the possibility open for the company to initiate an action for liability."

## INVESTOR PROTECTIONS

Investor protections encompass voting items that impact the ability of shareowners to access information needed to make prudent decisions about ownership and to exercise their rights to influence the board, election processes, and governance structure of the company. These items fall into categories relating to audits, disclosures, anti-takeover defenses and vote related mechanisms. SBA is committed to strong investor rights across all these domains and will exercise our votes to protect and strengthen the rights of shareowners in these crucial areas.

While SBA is deferential to the company and board on many issues affecting the operations of the firm whenever prudent, we are not deferential when it comes to the ability to exercise shareowner responsibilities, which includes monitoring the firm and the board of directors and acting to support change when it is warranted. We require and therefore will support strong audit functioning and detailed disclosures in a variety of areas. Strong investor rights, as well as policies that do not allow board entrenchment, are necessary for investors to protect share value.

### Auditors

#### RATIFICATION OF AUDITORS: CASE-BY-CASE

Most major companies around the world use one of the major international auditing firms to conduct their audits. As such, concerns about the quality and objectivity of the audit are typically minimal, and the reappointment of the auditor is usually a routine matter. In the United States, companies are not legally required to allow shareowners to ratify the selection of auditors; however, a growing number are doing so. Typically, proxy statements disclose the name of the company's auditor and state that the board is responsible for selection of the firm.

The auditor's role in safeguarding investor interests is critical. Independent auditors have an important public trust, for it is the auditor's impartial and professional opinion that assures investors that a company's financial statements are accurate.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the practice of auditors providing non-audit services to companies must be closely scrutinized. While large auditors may have internal barriers to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest, an auditor's ability to remain objective becomes questionable when fees paid to the auditor for non-audit services such as management consulting, general bookkeeping, and special situation audits exceed the standard annual audit fees. In addition to ensuring that the auditor is free from conflicts of interest with the company, it is also important to ensure the quality of the work that is being performed.<sup>32</sup>

One of the major threats to high quality financial reporting and audit quality is the risk of material financial fraud. Several studies have analyzed the nature, extent, and characteristics of fraudulent financial reporting, as well as the negative consequences for investors and management.<sup>33</sup> The studies' authors noted that auditing standards place a responsibility on auditors to plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements are free of material misstatement, whether caused by error or fraud.

SBA generally supports proposals to ratify auditors unless there is reason to believe that the auditing firm has become complacent in its duties, or its independence has been compromised.<sup>34</sup> SBA believes all publicly held corporations should rotate

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<sup>31</sup> Hollis Ashbaugh-Skaife, et al, The Effect of SOX Internal Control Deficiencies on Firm Risk and Cost of Equity June 10, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Carcello & Chan Li, "Costs and Benefits of Requiring an Engagement Partner Signature: Recent Experience in the United Kingdom," Corporate Governance Center at the University of Tennessee, Working Paper, 2012. This study found that when an audit partner's name is included within the audit report, the quality of the audit increases, along with auditor fees.

<sup>33</sup> Mark S. Beasley, Joseph V. Carcello, Dana R. Hermanson, and Terry L. Neal, "An Analysis of Alleged Auditor Deficiencies in SEC Fraud Investigation: 1998-2010," University of Tennessee Corporate Governance Center, May 2013. Also see, Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO), "Fraudulent Financial Reporting: 1998-2007, An Analysis of U.S. Public Companies," 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Jonath Stanley, Auburn University, "Is the Audit Fee Disclosure a Leading Indicator of Clients' Business Risk?," American Association of Accountants Quarterly Journal, 2011. For example, non-audit fees, primarily tax and other consulting fees, can exceed audit fee revenue by a large margin, impairing an audit firm's objectivity. This study examined about 5,000 small sized companies over a seven-year period and concluded that rising audit fees were a leading indicator for future deterioration in financial performance as measured by firms' return on assets, determined by both earnings and cash flows.

their choice of auditors periodically. Shareowners should be given the opportunity to review the performance of the auditors annually and ratify the board's selection of an auditor for the coming year.<sup>35</sup>

The audit committee should oversee the firm's interaction with the external auditor and disclose any non-audit fees completed by the auditor. Audit committees should disclose all factors considered when selecting or reappointing an audit firm, information related to negotiating auditor fees, the tenure of the current external audit firm, and a description of how the audit committee oversees and evaluates the work of their external auditor. Serial or significant restatements are potential indications of a poorly performing auditor, audit committee, or both.

#### APPOINT INTERNAL STATUTORY AUDITORS (JAPAN, HONG KONG, SOUTH KOREA): FOR

Most votes for auditors in Japan are to approve internal statutory auditors (also known as corporate auditors) rather than external auditors. Statutory auditors have the right to attend board meetings, although not to vote, and the obligation to cooperate with the external auditor and to approve its audit. They are required by law to keep board members informed of the company's activities, but this has become a largely symbolic function. They do not have the ability to remove directors from office. Internal auditors serve for terms of four years and may be renominated an indefinite number of times. While many investors view statutory auditors in a positive light, they are not substitutes for independent directors.

In Japan, at least half of internal auditors must be independent. While companies have complied with the technical requirements of the law, many have ignored its spirit. It is in shareowners' interests to improve the audit and oversight functions in Japan and to increase the accountability of companies to shareowners. Therefore, the SBA will not support internal auditors specified as independent but with a past affiliation with the company. When a statutory auditor attends fewer than 75 percent of board and auditor meetings, without a reasonable excuse, the SBA will generally vote against the auditor's appointment.

In other capital markets, such as South Korea, proposals seeking shareowner approval for statutory auditors' fees are not controversial. Generally, management should disclose details of all fees paid to statutory auditors well in advance of the meeting date so that shareowners can make informed decisions about statutory auditor remuneration requests. In any market, SBA may vote against the appointment of the auditor if necessary information about the auditors and fees has not been appropriately disclosed.

#### REMOVE/ACCEPT RESIGNATION OF AUDITORS: CASE-BY-CASE

SBA seeks to ensure auditors have not been pressured to resign in retaliation for their opinions or for providing full disclosure.

#### AUDITOR INDEMNIFICATION AND LIMITATION OF LIABILITY: CASE-BY-CASE

Auditor indemnification and limitation of liability are evaluated on an individual basis. Factors to be assessed by the SBA include:

- the terms of the auditor agreement and degree to which it impacts shareowners' rights;
- motivation and rationale for establishing the agreements;
- quality of disclosure; and
- historical practices in the audit area.

SBA will consider voting against auditor ratification if the auditor engagement contract includes provisions for alternative dispute resolution, liability caps, and caps on punitive damages (or the exclusion of punitive damages). Such limitations on

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<sup>35</sup> Under Rule 10A-3(b)(2) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended, the audit committee, "must be directly responsible for the appointment, compensation, retention and oversight," of the independent auditor. Section 303A.06 of the New York Stock Exchange Listed Company Manual requires that the audit committees of its listed companies satisfy the requirements of Rule 10A-3. As a result of these requirements, audit committee charters normally include the responsibility for and total discretion to select, evaluate, compensate, and oversee the work of any registered public accounting firm engaged in preparing or issuing audit report(s).

liability and indemnification shift the risk from the auditor to the company, and therefore, the shareowners. The staff of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has stated that it believes caps on punitive damages in audit contracts are not in the public interest and compromises auditor independence.<sup>36</sup> SBA will also consider voting against audit committee members if they have diminished the value or independence of the audit, such as when a company has entered into an agreement with its auditor requiring alternative dispute resolution or punitive liability caps.

#### APPROVE ACCOUNTING TRANSACTIONS (OTHER THAN DIVIDEND): CASE-BY-CASE

In many international markets, proposals to approve accounting transfers are common and are often required to maintain specified balances in accounts as required by relevant market law. Companies are required to keep specific amounts in each of their reserves. Additionally, companies may, in some instances, be required by law to present shareowners with a special auditors' report confirming the presence or absence of any non-tax-deductible expenses, as well as the transfer of these to the company's taxable income if applicable. In the absence of any contentious matters, the SBA is generally in favor.

#### AUDIT FIRM ROTATION, TERM RESTRICTIONS, AND SCOPE OF ENGAGEMENT PROPOSALS: CASE-BY-CASE

These shareowner proposals typically ask companies to adopt practices that are thought to help preserve auditor independence, such as prohibiting the auditor from providing non-audit services or capping the level of non-audit services and/or requiring periodic rotation of the audit firm. These practices are expected to help maintain a neutral and independent auditor by making the auditor's relationship with the company less lucrative.<sup>37</sup>

While term limits may result in higher audit fees, the positive impact would be that a new auditor would periodically provide a fresh look at the company's accounting practices. A practice of term limits also ensures that the audit won't see the company as a never-ending client, and perhaps will be more inclined to flag questionable practices. Despite attracting a lot of attention, mandatory audit rotation has not been required by regulators or by exchange listing standards.<sup>38</sup> SBA weighs the aspects of the individual situation and proposal terms when making voting decisions concerning audit rotation, considering the length of tenure for the auditor, the level of audit and non-audit fees, and the history of audit quality. A history of restatements or atypical fees increases the likelihood of SBA supporting these proposals. Most companies seek shareowner ratification of the auditor, and the lack of this provision would also increase the likelihood of SBA supporting a reasonable proposal.

### Disclosures

#### COMPANY REPORTS OR DISCLOSURES: CASE-BY-CASE

Often, shareowner proposals do not request that companies take a specific action, but instead simply request information in the form of reports or disclosures on their policies or actions. Disclosure requests cover a variety of topics. SBA considers supporting disclosure requests when there is a reasonable expectation that the information would help investors make better risk assessments and for topics that cover issues that could have a substantial impact on shareowner value. We evaluate the company's existing disclosures on the topic and weigh the benefit from additional disclosures against the cost to the company, which includes not just the direct cost of compiling information but potential of disclosing sensitive or competitively damaging information. For each proposal, the SBA considers whether such information is already publicly provided by the company, and we do not support redundant proposal requests.

Common disclosure requests and SBA's evaluation process:

- Greenhouse gas emissions—Companies are already required by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to disclose material expected capital expenditures when operating in locales with greenhouse gas emission standards.

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<sup>36</sup> U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, Office of the Chief Accountant: Application of the Commission's Rules on Auditor Independence – Frequently Asked Questions, December 13, 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Max H. Bazerman, George Loewenstein, and Don A. Moore, "Why Good Accountants Do Bad Audits." Harvard Business Review, Vol. 80, Issue 11, Nov. 1, 2002.

<sup>38</sup> The Conference Board Commission on Public Trust and Private Enterprise, "Corporate Governance: Principles, Recommendations and Specific Best Practice Suggestions." Parts 2 and 3, Jan. 9, 2003. PCAOB Concept Release No. 2011-006. August 16, 2011. [http://pcaobus.org/Rules/Rulesmaking/Docket037/Release\\_2011-006.pdf](http://pcaobus.org/Rules/Rulesmaking/Docket037/Release_2011-006.pdf). Jackson, Modrich, and Roebuck, "Mandatory Audit Firm Rotation and Audit Quality," 2007; Chung, H., "Selective Mandatory Rotation and Audit Quality: An Empirical Investigation of Auditor Designation Policy in Korea," 2004. Also see, Martinez and Reis, "Audit Firm Rotation and Earnings Management in Brazil," 2010.

Companies may also be required to disclose risk factors regarding existing or pending legislation that relates to climate change and assess whether such regulation will likely have any material effect on the company's financial condition or results, the impact of which is not limited to negative consequences but should include new opportunities as well.

- Energy efficiency—SBA considers the current level of disclosure related to energy efficiency policies, initiatives, and performance measures; the company's level of participation in voluntary energy efficiency programs and initiatives; the company's compliance with applicable legislation and/or regulations regarding energy efficiency; and the company's energy efficiency policies and initiatives relative to industry peers.
- Water supply and conservation—Companies should disclose crucial water supply issues, as well as contingency planning to ensure adequate supply for anticipated company demand levels. SBA often supports proposals seeking disclosure of water supply dependency or preparation of a report pertaining to sustainable water supply for company operations.
- Political contributions and expenditure—Companies should disclose the amount and rationales for making donations to political campaigns, political action committees (PACs), and other trade groups or special interest organizations. SBA typically considers the following factors:
  - Recent significant controversy or litigation related to the company's political contributions or governmental affairs;
  - The public availability of a company policy on political contributions and trade association spending, including the types of organizations supported;
  - The business rationale for supporting political organizations;
  - The board oversight and compliance procedures related to such expenditures of corporate assets.
- Operations in protected or sensitive areas—such operations may expose companies to increased oversight and the potential for associated risk and controversy. The SBA generally supports requests for reports outlining potential environmental damage from operations in protected regions unless operations in the specified regions are not permitted by current laws or regulations, the company does not currently have operations or plans to develop operations in protected regions, or the company provides disclosure on its operations and environmental policies in these regions comparable to industry peers.
- Community impact assessments—Controversies, fines, and litigation can have a significant negative impact on a company's financials, public reputation, and even ability to operate. Companies operating in areas where potential impact is a concern often develop internal controls aimed at mitigating exposure to these risks by enforcing, and in many cases, exceeding local regulations and laws. SBA considers proposals to report on company policies in this area by evaluating the company's current disclosures, industry norms, and the potential impact and severity of risks associated with the company's operations.
- Supply chain risks—Often these proposals seek information for better understanding risks to the company through their materials purchasing and labor practices. For example, allegations of sweatshop labor or child labor can harm sales and reputation, so knowledge of the company's policies for preventing these practices are highly relevant to shareowners. SBA considers the terms of the proposal against the current company disclosures and industry standards, as well as the potential severity of risks.

## Anti-takeover Defenses

### ADVANCE NOTICE REQUIREMENTS FOR SHAREOWNER PROPOSALS/NOMINATIONS: CASE-BY-CASE

SBA generally supports proposals that allow shareowners to submit proposals as close to the meeting date as reasonably possible and within the broadest window possible. Requests to shrink the window and/or move advance notice deadlines to as early as 150 days or 180 days prior to meetings have been presented by a number of company boards in recent years. Such early deadlines hinder shareowners' ability to make proposals and go beyond what is reasonably required for sufficient board notice. In addition, many companies now request shareowner approval of "second generation advance notice bylaws", which

require shareowner nominees to submit company-prepared director questionnaires.<sup>39</sup> While the SBA appreciates increased disclosure of the qualifications of nominees (and incumbents), we disapprove of such requirements if they serve to frustrate shareowner-proposed nominees.

#### AMEND BYLAWS WITHOUT SHAREOWNER CONSENT: AGAINST

The SBA does not support proposals giving the board exclusive authority to amend the bylaws. We also discourage board members from taking such unilateral actions and may withhold votes from board members that do so. Shareowners should be party to any such decisions, a view supported by Delaware courts where a majority of U.S. firms are domiciled.<sup>42</sup> If unusual circumstances necessitate such action, at a minimum, unilateral adoption should incorporate a sunset provision or a near-term window for eventual shareowner approval.

#### RESTRICT LEGAL RECOURSE METHODS: AGAINST

The SBA generally opposes restrictions on shareowner ability to pursue options of legal recourse. This includes binding or forced arbitration, fee-shifting, and exclusive forum bylaws.<sup>40</sup> Standard access to the court system is a fundamental shareowner right. SBA generally votes against proposals to establish exclusive forum and supports proposals requesting that exclusive forum provisions be ratified by shareowners. SBA will critically examine the company's rationale for limiting shareowners' rights to legal remedy, including choice of venue and any material harm that may have been caused by related litigation outside its jurisdiction of incorporation in making a voting decision.

#### POISON PILLS: AGAINST

Poison pills used to be the most prevalent takeover defense among S&P 500 companies, but their utilization has steadily declined since 2002. The vast majority of pills were instituted after November 1985, when the Delaware Supreme Court upheld a company's right to adopt a poison pill without shareowner approval in *Moran v. Household International, Inc.* Poison pills are 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 a post-merger company. Generally, poison pills accomplish these tasks by issuing rights or warrants to shareowners that are essentially worthless unless triggered by a hostile acquisition attempt. They are often referred to by the innocuous but misleading name "shareowner rights plans".

The SBA supports proposals asking a company to submit its poison pill for shareowner ratification and generally votes against proposals approving or creating a poison pill. The best defense against hostile takeovers is not necessarily a poison pill, but an effective board making prudent financial and strategic decisions for the company.<sup>41</sup> SBA will consider voting against board members that adopt or renew a poison pill unless the pill is subject to shareowner ratification within a year of adoption or renewal.

#### LIMIT WRITTEN CONSENT: CASE-BY-CASE

The SBA votes against proposals to unduly restrict or prohibit shareowners' ability to take action by written consent and supports proposals to allow or make easier shareowner action by written consent. Most states allow shareowners to take direct action such as adopting a shareowner resolution or electing directors through a consent solicitation, which does not involve a

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<sup>39</sup> Weingarten, Marc and Erin Magnor, "Second Generation Advance Notification Bylaws" Harvard Law School Corporate Governance Forum, March 17, 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Claudia H. Allen, "Delaware Corporations – Can Delaware Forum Selection Clauses in Charters or Bylaws Keep Litigation in the Court of Chancery?," April 18, 2011. Early adopters of the exclusive forum provision chose to enact bylaw provisions without seeking shareowner approval. However, the *Galaviz v. Berg* decision by the U.S. District Court for Northern California if Oracle's exclusive forum provision was unenforceable, in part due to Oracle's failure to bring the provision before shareowners.

<sup>40</sup> In a March 2010 opinion, the Delaware Court of Chancery provided an opportunity for any Delaware corporation to establish the Court as the exclusive forum for "intra-entity" corporate disputes, such as claims of breach of fiduciary duty. Such claims have been used to overturn directors' business judgments on mergers, and other matters. Subsequently, a number of U.S. companies have decided to bring the exclusive forum provision to a shareowner vote, and others have amended their charter or by-law provisions.

<sup>41</sup> Srinidhi, Bin and Sen, Kaustav, "Effect of Poison Pills on Value Relevance of Earnings."

physical meeting. Alternatively, consent solicitations can be used to call special meetings and vote on substantive items taking place at the meeting itself.

#### LIMIT SPECIAL MEETINGS: CASE-BY-CASE

The SBA votes against proposals that unduly restrict or prohibit a shareowner's ability to call special meetings. We generally support proposals that make it easier for shareowners to call special meetings. Most states' corporate statutes allow shareowners to call a special meeting when they want to present certain matters before the next annual meeting. The percentage of shareowner votes required to force the corporation to call the meeting often depends on the state's statutes, as does the corporation's ability to limit or deny altogether a shareowner's right to call a special meeting.

#### SUPERMAJORITY VOTE REQUIREMENTS: AGAINST

The SBA does not support shareowner proposals that require supermajority voting thresholds. Supermajority requirements can be particularly burdensome if combined with a requirement for the vote result to be calculated using the number of shares outstanding (rather than the votes cast). There have been many instances when a company's requirements called for a proposal to be supported by eighty percent of shares outstanding but failed because just under eighty percent of shares outstanding were voted. This can be particularly problematic for resolutions to approve mergers and other significant business combinations. Voting results should simply be determined by a majority vote of the disinterested shares.<sup>42</sup> SBA supports simple majority voting requirements based on shares voted for the passage of any resolution, ordinary or extraordinary, and regardless of whether proposed by management or shareowners.

#### ADOPT SUPERVOTING RIGHTS ("TIME-PHASED VOTING"): AGAINST

Time-phased voting involves the granting of super-voting rights to shareowners who have held their stock for some specified period, commonly for a period of 3-5 years.<sup>43</sup> The practice is intended to be a reward for long-term shareowners and to make the votes of entities with a short-term focus relatively less effective. However, differential voting rights distort the commensurate relationship between ownership and voting power, and however well-intentioned, the practice ultimately risks harm to companies and their shareowners. By undermining the fundamental connection between voting power and economic interest, it increases risk to investors rather than reducing it. Further, it creates murkiness in the voting process where transparency is already lacking. While we value our right to vote and at times would even have increased rights under such a policy as a long-term owner, we do not wish to subvert the economic process for our own benefit, and we are concerned the practice has potential for significant harm and abuse. We do not endorse any practice that undermines the fundamental link between ownership and determination: one share, one vote.

#### LIMIT VOTING RIGHTS: AGAINST

The SBA supports maximization of shareowners' voting rights at corporations. Any attempts to restrict or impair shareowner voting rights, such as caps on voting rights, holding period requirements, and restrictions to call special meetings, will be opposed.

#### ABSTENTION VOTING TABULATION: CASE-BY-CASE

Abstentions should count for quorum purposes but should be excluded from voting statistics reporting percentages for and against. Some companies request to count abstentions in with against votes when reporting tabulations. This practice makes

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<sup>42</sup> Ravid, S. Abraham and Matthew I. Spiegel, "Toehold Strategies, Takeover Laws and Rival Bidders." *Journal of Banking and Finance*, Vol. 23, No. 8, 1999, pp. 1219-1242.

<sup>43</sup> Under SEC Rule 19c-4, firms are generally prohibited from utilizing several forms of stock that deviate from a one-share, one-vote standard. Such instances include tracking stocks, different stock classes with asymmetric voting rights (e.g., dual class shares), shares with time-phased voting rights as well as shares of stock with capped voting or even no rights whatsoever. However, under an amendment to the Rule made in 1994, most U.S. companies are exempted from such restrictions under circumstances.

for inaccurate voting statistics and defies the intentions of the shareowners casting their votes. We strongly support abstention tabulation for matters of quorum satisfaction only.

#### TABULATING VOTES: CASE-BY-CASE

The SBA supports proposals that allow for independent third parties to examine and tabulate ballots. We support practices of end-to-end vote confirmation for accuracy and security in casting votes.

#### ESTABLISH A DISTINCTION FAVORING REGISTERED HOLDERS/BENEFICIAL HOLDERS: AGAINST

An extremely small and shrinking percentage of shareowners hold shares in registered form, nearing only one percent of shares outstanding. SBA does not believe any preference or distinction in ownership holding mechanism is necessary or useful. We oppose the adoption of any policy using distinctions among shareowners based on how shares are held.



## CORPORATE STRUCTURE

These proposals seek to make some change in the corporate structure and are often operational in nature. In every case, SBA decides by considering the impact of the change on the financial value and health of the company, as well as its impact on shareowner rights. These proposals include corporate restructurings, capital structure changes, changes to the articles of incorporation and other various operational items. While many of these proposals are routine, they are not inconsequential. Some have profound impact on shareowner value and rights. Shareowners should have the opportunity to approve any issuance of shares or securities that carry equity-like claims or rights. Furthermore, companies may bundle non-routine items with routine items to obtain a more favorable outcome, so the SBA must examine these proposals on a case-by-case basis. SBA may vote against bundled items in any case if the bundle includes highly negative components.

### MERGERS/ACQUISITIONS/SPINOFFS: CASE-BY-CASE

SBA evaluates these proposals based on the economic merits of the proposal and anticipated synergies or advantages. We also consider opinions of financial advisors. Support for the proposal may be mitigated by potential conflicts between management's interests and those of shareowners and negative impacts on corporate governance and shareowner rights. The SBA may oppose the proposal if there is a significant lack of information to make an informed voting decision.

For any proposal, the following items are evaluated:

- Economic merits and anticipated synergies;
- Independence of board, or special committee, recommending the transaction;
- Process for identifying, selecting, and negotiating with partners;
- Independence of financial advisor and financial opinion for the transaction;
- Tax and regulatory impacts;
- Corporate governance changes;
- Aggregate valuation of the proposal.

### APPRAISAL RIGHTS: FOR

SBA generally supports proposals to restore or provide shareowners with rights of appraisal. In many states, mergers and other corporate restructuring transactions are subject to appraisal rights. Rights of appraisal provide shareowners who are not satisfied with the terms of certain corporate transactions the right to demand a judicial review to determine a fair value for their shares. If a majority of shareowners approve a given transaction, the exercise of appraisal rights by a minority of shareowners will not necessarily prevent the transaction from taking place. Therefore, if a small minority of shareowners succeed in obtaining what they believe is a fair value, appraisal rights may benefit all shareowners. If enough shareowners dissented and if the courts found a transaction's terms were unfair, such rights could prevent a transaction that other shareowners had already approved.

### ASSET PURCHASES/SALES: CASE-BY-CASE

Boards may propose a shareowner vote on the sale or purchase of significant assets; sometimes these proposals are part of a strategy shift driven by changes in the marketplace, problematic corporate performance, or activist-investor campaigns. The SBA evaluates asset purchase proposals on a case-by-case basis, considering the following factors:

- Transaction price;
- Fairness opinion;
- Financial and strategic benefits;
- Impact on the balance sheet and working capital;
- The negotiation history and process;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Other alternatives for the business; and
- Non-completion risk.

#### APPROVE REORGANIZATION OF DIVISION OR DEPARTMENT/ARRANGEMENT SCHEME, LIQUIDATION: CASE-BY-CASE

Resolutions approving corporate reorganizations or restructurings range from the routine shuffling of subsidiaries within a group to major rescue programs for ailing companies. Such resolutions are usually supported unless there are clear conflicts of interest among the various parties or negative impact on shareowners' rights. In the case of routine reorganizations of assets or subsidiaries within a group, the primary focus with the proposed changes is to ensure that shareowner value is being preserved, including the impact of the reorganization on the control of group assets, final ownership structure, relative voting power of existing shareowners if the share capital is being adjusted, and the expected benefits arising from the changes. Options are far more limited in the case of a distress restructuring of a company or group as shareowners often have few choices and little time. In most of these instances, the company has a negative asset value, and shareowners would have no value remaining after liquidation. SBA seeks to ensure that the degree of dilution proposed is consistent with the claims of outside parties and is commensurate with the relative commitments of other company shareowners.

#### APPROVE SPECIAL PURPOSE ACQUISITION COMPANY (SPAC) TRANSACTION: CASE-BY-CASE

A SPAC is a pooled investment vehicle designed to invest in private-equity type transactions, particularly leveraged buyouts. SPACs are shell companies that have no operations at the time of their initial public offering but are intended to merge with or acquire other companies. Most SPACs grant shareowners voting rights to approve proposed business combinations. SBA evaluates these proposals based on their financial impact as well as their impact on shareowners' ability to maintain and exercise their rights.

#### FORMATION OF HOLDING COMPANY: CASE-BY-CASE

The SBA evaluates proposals to create a parent holding company on a case-by-case basis, considering the rationale for the change, any financial, regulatory or tax benefits, and impact on capital and ownership structure. SBA may vote against proposals that result in increases in common or preferred stock in excess of the allowable maximum or adverse changes in shareowner rights.

#### APPROVE A "GOING DARK" TRANSACTION: CASE-BY-CASE

Deregistrations, or "going-dark" transactions, occur rarely, whereby companies cease SEC reporting but continue to trade publicly. Such transactions are intended to reduce the number of shareowners below three hundred and are typically achieved either by a reverse stock split (at a very high ratio with fractional shares resulting from the reverse split being cashed out), by a reverse/forward stock split (with fractional shares resulting from the reverse split being cashed out), or through a cash buyout of shares from shareowners owning less than a designated number of shares (tender offer or odd-lot stock repurchase). Such transactions allow listed companies to de-list from their stock exchange and to terminate the registration of their common stock under the Securities & Exchange Act of 1934, so that, among other things, they do not have to comply with the requirements of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002.<sup>44</sup> Companies seeking this approval tend to be smaller capitalization firms and those with lower quality financial accounting. SBA would consider the impact of the lack of disclosure and oversight and loss of liquidity and shareowner rights in making a decision.

#### LEVERAGED BUYOUT (LBO): CASE-BY-CASE

A leveraged buyout is a takeover of a company using borrowed funds, normally by management or a group of investors. Most often, the target company's assets serve as security for the loan taken out by the acquiring firm, which repays the loan out of cash flow of the acquired company. SBA may support LBOs when shareowners receive a fair value including an appropriate premium over the current market value of their shares.

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<sup>44</sup> "Why Do Firms Go Dark? Causes and Economic Consequences of Voluntary SEC Deregistrations," Christian Leuz, Alexander Triantis and Tracy Wang, Finance Working Paper Number 155/2007, European Corporate Governance Institute, March 2008.

When the acquirer is a controlling shareowner, legal rulings have imposed a higher standard of review to ensure that this type of transaction, referred to as an entire fairness review, is fair to existing shareowners. Typically, investor protections include review by an independent committee of the board and/or approval by a majority of the remaining shareowners. Whether a buyout is pursued by a controlling shareowner can impact the valuation and premiums, with one study finding that buyouts in which an independent committee reviewed the deal terms produced 14 percent higher average premiums for investors.<sup>45</sup> However, deals requiring majority-of-the-minority ratification did not significantly impact the level of premium paid to investors. Researchers found that the size of the premium paid changed depending on who initiated the transaction, with significantly lower premiums associated with deals initiated by management. As well, the study's findings mimic other empirical evidence demonstrating that 'go-shop' provisions, whereby additional bidders are solicited, were ineffective and may be used to camouflage under-valued management buyouts.<sup>46</sup>

#### NET OPERATING LOSS CARRY-FORWARD (NOL) & ACQUISITION RESTRICTIONS: CASE-BY-CASE

Companies may seek approval of amendments to their certificate of incorporation intended to restrict certain acquisitions of its common stock to preserve net operating loss carry-forwards (or "NOLs"). NOLs can represent a significant asset for the company, one that can be effective at reducing future taxable income. Section 382 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 imposes limitations on the future use of the company's NOLs if the company undergoes an ownership change; therefore, some companies seek to limit certain transactions by adopting ownership limits. Firms often utilize a shareowner rights plan (poison pill) in conjunction with NOL-oriented acquisition restrictions.

While stock ownership limitations may allow the company to maximize use of its NOLs to offset future income, they may significantly restrict certain shareowners from increasing their ownership stake in the company. Such ownership limitations can be viewed as an anti-takeover device. Though these restrictions on shareowners are undesirable, SBA often supports proposals when firms seek restrictions solely to protect NOLs. We review the company's corporate governance structure and other control protections in conjunction with the proposal and weigh the negative impact of the restrictions against the financial value of the NOLs (relative to the firm's market capitalization) in making a decision.

#### CHANGE OF CORPORATE FORM (GERMANY, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND): CASE-BY-CASE

This proposal seeks shareowner approval to convert the company from one corporate form to another. Examples of different corporate forms include the following: Inc., LLP, PLP, LLC, AG, SE. The SBA generally votes FOR such proposals unless there are concerns with the motivation or financial impact of a change to a firm's corporate structure.

Public Benefit Corporations (PBC) are for-profit corporations that have also adopted a public benefit purpose embedded in its certificate of incorporation. This public benefit is intended to have positive effects on a category of person(s), entities, or communities other than the financial interests of shareowners. When deciding to support or oppose resolutions to convert to a PBC, expected (or actual) accruals to shareholder value will be the primary consideration. Additionally, the SBA will consider company-specific characteristics, the stated rationale for such structure, and the impact on shareholders' rights.

### Capital Structure

#### CHANGE AUTHORIZED SHARE CAPITAL: CASE-BY-CASE

The SBA generally supports authorized share capital increases up to 100 percent of the current number of outstanding shares. We will consider additional increases if management demonstrates a reasonable use. It is important that publicly held corporations have authorization for shares needed for ordinary business purposes, including raising new capital, funding reasonable executive compensation programs, business acquisitions, and facilitating stock splits and stock dividends. Increases beyond 100 percent of the current number of outstanding shares will be scrutinized to ensure its use will benefit shareowners.

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<sup>45</sup> Matthew Cain, and Steven Davidoff, "Form Over Substance? The Value of Corporate Process and Management Buyouts," August 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Adonis Antoniadis, Charles Calomiris, and Donna M Hitscherich, "No Free Shop: Why Target Companies in MBOs and Private Equity Transactions Sometimes Choose Not to Buy 'Go-Shop' Options," November 2013; Guhan Subramanian, "Go-Shops vs. No-Shops in Private Equity Deals: Evidence and Implications," *The Business Lawyer*, Volume 63, May 2008.

We apply a stricter standard if the company has not stated a use for the additional shares or has significant levels of previously authorized shares still available for issue. Proposals that include shares with unequal voting rights will likely be opposed.

In the case of rights offerings, SBA considers the dilution and extent to which issued rights may be subscribed, both by SBA individually and other shareowners collectively, and how that may affect or adversely concentrate the level of control if a large single shareowner exists. Proposals to reduce authorized share capital can result from a variety of corporate actions, ranging from routine accounting measures to reductions pertaining to a significant corporate restructuring in the face of bankruptcy. These proposals can vary significantly from market to market because of local laws and accounting standards. In all instances, the SBA considers whether the reduction in authorized share capital is for legitimate corporate purposes and not to be used as an anti-takeover tactic.

#### STOCK SPLIT OR REVERSE STOCK SPLIT: FOR

Typically, the SBA supports reasonable proposals for stock splits or reverse stock splits. These proposals often seek to scale back the cost of each share into what is traditionally thought of as a comfortable price and trading zone, which seeks to influence the psychology of the market's perception of price more than anything else. Reverse stock splits may be requested to ensure a company's shares will not be subject to delisting by their exchange's standards, often following a significant negative shock to the share price.

#### DUAL CLASS STOCK: AGAINST

SBA opposes dual class share structures. The one share, one vote principle is essential to proper functioning of capitalism; dual class shares distort the commensurate relationship between economic interest and voting power and ultimately risk harm to companies and their shareowners.<sup>47</sup> Several academic studies have documented an array of value-destroying effects stemming directly from dual class share structures.<sup>48 49</sup> SBA will support proposals asking companies to move away from dual class structures. SBA may withhold votes or cast votes against the election of directors in cases where a company completes an IPO with a dual or multi-class share structure without a reasonable sunset provision on the unequal voting rights. We will generally support proposals that provide for the disclosure of voting results broken down by share class when dual class structures exist.

#### APPROVE GENERAL SHARE ISSUANCE WITH PRE-EMPTIVE RIGHTS: CASE-BY-CASE

General issuance requests under both authorized and conditional capital systems allow companies to issue shares to raise funds for general financing purposes. Approval of such requests gives companies sufficient flexibility to carry out ordinary business activities without having to bear the expense of calling shareowner meetings for every issuance. Pre-emptive rights guarantee current shareowners the first opportunity to purchase shares of new issuances of stock in the class they own in an amount proportional to the percentage of the class they already own. SBA generally supports issuance requests with preemptive rights when the amount of shares requested is less than the unissued ordinary share capital or one-third of the issued ordinary share

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<sup>47</sup> Bebchuk, Lucian Arye, Kraakman, Reinier H. and Triantis, George G., "Stock Pyramids, Cross-Ownership, and Dual Class Equity: The Creation and Agency Costs of Separating Control from Cash Flow Rights". As published in CONCENTRATED CORPORATE OWNERSHIP, R. Morck, Ed., pp. 445-460, 2000 Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=147590>. Masulis, Ronald W., Wang, Cong and Xie, Fei, "Agency Problems at Dual-Class Companies" (November 12, 2006). Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=961158>. Tinaikar, Surjit, "The Voluntary Disclosure Effects of Separating Control Rights from Cash Flow Rights" (November 2006). Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=951547>.

<sup>48</sup> Kastiel, Kobi, "Executive Compensation in Controlled Companies," Harvard Law School Working Paper, October 2014. Claessens, Stijn & Fan, Joseph P.H. & Lang, Larry, 2002. "The Benefits and Costs of Group Affiliation: Evidence from East Asia," CEPR Discussion Papers 3364, C.E.P.R. Discussion Papers, revised. Bennedsen, Morten and Nielsen, Kasper Meisner, "The Principle of Proportional Ownership, Investor Protection and Firm Value in Western Europe" (October 2006). ECGI - Finance Working Paper No. 134/2006 Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=941054>. Gompers, Paul A., Ishii, Joy L. and Metrick, Andrew, "Extreme Governance: An Analysis of Dual-Class Companies in the United States" (May 1, 2008). AFA 2005 Philadelphia Meetings Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=562511> or DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.562511. Cremers, Martijn and Allen Ferrell, "Thirty Years of Corporate Governance: Firms Valuation & Stock Returns" (September 2009). Yale ICF Working Paper No. 09-09. Available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1279650>. Puttonen, Vesa, Ikaheimo, Seppo and Ratilainen, Tuomas, "External Corporate Governance and Performance - Evidence from the Nordic Countries" (January 30, 2007) Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=960431>. Jiraporn, Pornsit, 2005, "An Empirical Analysis of Corporate Takeover Defenses and Earnings Management: Evidence from the U.S.," Applied financial Economics (University of Warwick, U.K.), Vol. 15, No. 5, pp. 293-303. Li, Kai, Ortiz-Molina, Hernan and Zhao, Shelly, "Do Voting Rights Affect Institutional Investment Decisions? Evidence from Dual-Class Firms" (November 2007). Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=950295>. Dimitrov, Valentin and Jain, Prem C., "Recapitalization of One Class of Common Stock into Dual-class: Growth and Long-run Stock Returns" (September 1, 2004). Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=422080> or DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.422080.

capital. Issuance authority should be limited to a five-year timeframe. SBA also considers the issue price and any potential pricing discounts, as well as past issuance practices at the company, in judging the appropriateness of the terms and potential for misuse (such as granting large blocks at a discount to a third party). If insufficient information is disclosed about the issuance and conditions of its implementation, SBA may vote against authorization. Proposals that include shares with unequal voting rights will likely be opposed.

#### APPROVE GENERAL SHARE ISSUANCE WITHOUT PREEMPTIVE RIGHTS: CASE-BY-CASE

Companies may need the ability to raise funds for routine business contingencies without the expense of carrying out a rights issue. Such contingencies include, but are not limited to, facilitating stock compensation plans, small acquisitions, or payment for services. Recognizing that shareowners suffer dilution because of issuances, authorizations should be limited to a fixed number of shares or a percentage of capital at the time of issuance. The SBA generally supports issuance requests without preemptive rights up to a maximum of 20 percent above current levels of issued capital. Proposals that include shares with unequal voting rights will likely be opposed.

#### APPROVE ISSUE OF PREFERRED SHARES: CASE-BY-CASE

“Preferred share” typically refers to a class of stock that provides preferred dividend distributions and preferred liquidation rights as compared to common stock; however, preferred shares typically do not carry voting rights. SBA typically votes against preferred share issues that carry voting rights, include conversion rights, or have “blank check” ability. We typically support issuances without conversion or voting rights when the company demonstrates legitimate financial needs. Blank check preferred stock gives the board of directors the power to issue shares of preferred stock at their discretion, with voting, conversion, distribution, and other rights set by the board at the time of issuance. Blank check preferred stock can be used for sound corporate purposes like raising capital, stock acquisition, employee compensation, or stock splits or dividends. However, blank check preferred stock is also suited for use as an entrenchment device. The company could find a “white knight,” sell the knight a large block of shares, and defeat any possible takeover attempt. With such discretion outside the control of common stock shareowners, the SBA typically opposes any proposals to issue blank check preferred stock.

#### RESTRUCTURE/RECAPITALIZE: CASE-BY-CASE

These proposals deal with the alteration of a corporation’s capital structure, such as an exchange of bonds for stock. The SBA is in favor of recapitalizations when our overall investment position is protected during the restructuring process.

#### TARGETED SHARE PLACEMENT: CASE-BY-CASE

SBA typically supports shareowner proposals requesting that companies first obtain shareowner authorization before issuing voting stock, warrants, rights, or other securities convertible into voting stock, to any person or group, unless the voting rights at stake in the placement represent less than 5 percent of existing voting rights.

#### SHARE REPURCHASE: CASE-BY-CASE

When a company has excess cash, SBA’s preferred method for distributing it to shareowners is through adopting a quarterly dividend. Dividends are an effective means for returning cash and serve as an important signal to the market of earnings stability. Because dividend adoptions and subsequent changes are scrutinized, they serve as an important marker of a company’s commitment to return cash to shareowners. Repurchases on the other hand require no commitment to ongoing return of profits to shareowners. Repurchased shares often end up being granted to executives as part of stock compensation packages; this common use of cash is paying compensation and not a form of profit return to owners. Because of this, SBA strongly prefers dividend adoption over share repurchases. We support repurchases only in cases of unusual cash accumulation, such as from a divestiture of assets. Cash flows from operations that have an expected long-term generation pattern should be committed to owners through quarterly dividends. Repurchases are also supported if the rationale is that management believes the stock is undervalued. Companies should not commit to long term repurchases at any market price; evidence shows that many companies tend to repurchase shares at market-highs with these plans and generally buy at

inopportune times. Compensation programs should not depend upon metrics that are impacted by repurchases, or metrics should at least be adjusted to account for the impact of repurchases so that compensation is not affected by these programs.

#### DECLARE DIVIDENDS: FOR

Declaring a dividend is a preferred use of cash and method of releasing profits to shareowners. SBA generally supports dividend declarations unless the payout is unreasonably low, or the dividends are not sustainable by reserves and cash flow. Payouts less than 30 percent of net income for most markets are considered low.

#### TRACKING STOCK: CASE-BY-CASE

The SBA closely examines the issuance of tracking stock shares, particularly corporate governance rights attached to those shares. Normally, tracking stock is a separate class of common stock that “tracks” the performance of an individual business of a company. Tracking stock represents an equity claim on the cash flows of the tracked business as opposed to legal ownership of the company’s assets. Tracking stock is generally created through a charter amendment and provides for different classes of common stock, subject to shareowner approval. Due to their unique equity structure, we examine closely all the following issues when determining our support for such proposals: corporate governance features of tracking stock (including voting rights, if any), distribution method (share dividend or initial public offering), conversion terms and structure of stock-option plans tied to tracking stock.

#### APPROVE ISSUE OF BONDS, DEBENTURES, AND OTHER DEBT INSTRUMENTS: FOR

Generally, SBA supports debt issuance of reasonable amounts for the purpose of financing future growth and corporate needs. Debt issues may also add a beneficial monitoring component, making managers more accountable for corporate performance because if the company does not perform well financially, the company may not be able to meet its financial obligations. Studies have also examined the relationship between firms’ capital structure and the quality of their corporate governance mechanisms, confirming that corporations use debt in place of corporate governance tools.<sup>50</sup> While the SBA recognizes the need to employ various tools to minimize agency costs and align management interests with shareowner interests, corporations must not abdicate their corporate governance duties by expanding leverage.

When companies seek to issue convertible debt or debt with warrants, SBA considers the impact of the potential conversion on existing shareowners’ rights when making a decision. We may also support limits on conversion rights to prevent significant dilution of SBA’s ownership.

#### PRIVATE PLACEMENTS: CASE-BY-CASE

Private placement is a method of raising capital through the sale of securities to a relatively small number of investors rather than a public offering. Investors involved in private placement offerings typically include large banks, mutual funds, insurance companies and pension funds. Because the private placement is offered to a limited number of investors, detailed financial information is not always disclosed and the need for a prospectus is waived. Moreover, in the United States, the authority does not have to be registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission. The SBA evaluates private placements on a case-by-case basis, voting against if the private placement contains extraordinary voting rights or if it may be used in some other way as an anti-takeover defense.

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<sup>50</sup> Marquardt, Carol, “Managing EPS Through Accelerated Share Repurchases: Compensation Versus Capital Market Incentives.” Baruch College-CUNY, September 2007.

## Operational Items

### ADJOURN MEETING: CASE-BY-CASE

SBA generally votes against proposals to provide management with the authority to adjourn an annual or special meeting absent compelling reasons to support the proposal. The SBA may support proposals that relate specifically to soliciting votes for a merger or transaction if we support that merger or transaction.

### TRANSACT OTHER BUSINESS: AGAINST

This proposal provides a forum for addressing resolutions that may be brought up at the annual shareowner meeting. In most countries, the item is a formality and does not require a shareowner vote, but companies in certain countries include permission to transact other business as a voting item. This discretion is overly broad, and it is against the best interest of shareowners to give directors unbound permission to make corporate decisions without broad shareowner approval. Because most shareowners vote by proxy and would not know what issues will be raised under this item, SBA does not support this proposal.

### AMEND SHAREOWNERS' MEETING QUORUM REQUIREMENTS: CASE-BY-CASE

SBA supports quorums of a simple majority. We do not support super-majority quorum requirements.

### AMEND BYLAWS OR ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION: CASE-BY-CASE

The SBA considers the merits of the proposed amendment and its potential impact on shareowner rights and value. Different amendments should not be presented in a bundled format, which would prevent shareowners from making individual decisions on each provision. We may not support a bundled proposal that contains a mix of desirable and undesirable features.

### NAME CHANGE: FOR

Changing a company's name is a major step that has likely gone through extensive management consideration and/or marketing research. SBA generally supports these proposals.

### RECEIVE/APPROVE/AMEND REPORTS AND AUDITED ACCOUNTS FOR PREVIOUS FINANCIAL REPORTING PERIODS: CASE-BY-CASE

Generally, SBA supports these proposals unless we are aware of serious concerns about the accounting principles used or doubt the integrity of the company's auditor. Annual audits of a firm's financial statements should be mandatory and carried out by an independent auditor.

### CHANGE METHOD OF PREPARING ACCOUNTS/DISTRIBUTING FINANCIAL STATEMENTS TO SHAREOWNERS: CASE-BY-CASE

If the changes have been instituted by a nationwide regulation, they will be approved. Otherwise, they will be scrutinized to ensure they are not damaging to our interests. For instance, managers may seek to reclassify accounts to enhance their perceived performance. If this is the case, then managers may earn more in performance-based compensation without adding actual value to the firm.

### ADOPT OR CHANGE STAKE DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENT(S): CASE-BY-CASE

Proposals may be submitted to conform to recent changes in home market disclosure laws or other regulations. However, proposed levels that are below typical market standards are often only a pretext for an anti-takeover defense. Low disclosure levels may require a greater number of shareowners to disclose their ownership, causing a greater burden to shareowners and to the company. Positions of more than five percent are significant, however, and would be supported by SBA.



#### ACCESS TO PRELIMINARY VOTING TABULATIONS CONCERNING SHAREOWNER PROPOSALS: CASE-BY-CASE

The SBA supports equal access by management and shareowner proponents to preliminary voting results of shareowner proposals. Some proponents are concerned that companies may receive preliminary voting results and use the information to target shareowner engagement at a disadvantage to the proponent. Generally, the SBA will not support restricting access to this voting data to either party. Some proposals seek to restrict access while others may seek to place conditions on using the information.

#### RESTRICT INTER-SHAREOWNER COMMUNICATIONS: AGAINST

The ability to dialogue assists shareowners in seeing each other's perspective and helps owners exercise their rights in a free, capitalist market. SBA would not typically support restrictions beyond those of market regulators. In U.S. markets, the SEC has established enforceable guidelines that govern communications from shareowners or other parties for the purposes of soliciting proxies or pursuing corporate takeover measures.

#### CHANGE DATE OF FISCAL YEAR-END: FOR

Companies may seek shareowner approval to change their fiscal year end. Most countries require companies to hold their annual shareowners meeting within a certain period after the close of the fiscal year. While the SBA typically supports this routine proposal, opposition may be considered in cases where the company is seeking the change solely to postpone its annual meeting.

#### AUTHORIZE DIRECTORS TO MAKE APPLICATION FOR ONE OR MORE EXCHANGE LISTINGS: FOR

SBA generally supports proposals to authorize secondary share listings, absent evidence that important shareowner rights will not be harmed or restricted to an unreasonable extent. Secondary listings may provide additional funding in other capital markets and/or increase share liquidity.

#### SET OR CHANGE DATE OR PLACE OF ANNUAL MEETING: FOR

Flexibility is necessary in time and location of board meetings. As such, the SBA typically supports proposals that provide reasonable discretion to the board for scheduling a shareowner meeting. SBA would not support changes if their impact would potentially inhibit participation by shareowners.

#### CHANGE/SET PROCEDURE FOR CALLING BOARD MEETINGS: CASE-BY-CASE

The SBA embraces full disclosure regarding the procedures for calling board meetings. Therefore, we typically vote FOR improvements in these procedures and the disclosure of these procedures.

#### ALLOW DIRECTORS TO VOTE ON MATTERS IN WHICH THEY ARE INTERESTED: CASE-BY-CASE

Generally, SBA does not support these proposals unless it is shown that the directors' interests are not material, or the proposal conforms to federal regulations or stock exchange requirements.

#### CHANGE QUORUM REQUIREMENT FOR BOARD MEETINGS: CASE-BY-CASE

SBA may support reasonable changes in quorum requirements for board meetings. We would not support a quorum of less than fifty percent.

#### REINCORPORATION TO A DIFFERENT STATE: CASE-BY-CASE

Corporations may change the state in which they are incorporated as a way of changing minimum or mandatory governance provisions. A corporation having no business contacts or connections in a state may nonetheless choose that state as its place



of incorporation and that state's laws will determine certain aspects of its internal governance structure. The ability of corporations to choose their legal domicile has led many states to compete for revenue from corporate fees and taxes by enacting management-friendly incorporation codes. This competition has encouraged states to support an array of antitakeover devices and provide wide latitude in restricting the rights of shareowners.

Many companies changed their state of incorporation to Delaware since the 1980s because they viewed it as having a predictable and favorable legal climate for management. In 2007, North Dakota changed its laws of incorporation to create an environment of corporate governance best practices and strong shareowner rights. SBA will support proposals to shift the state of incorporation to states with net improvements in shareowner protections; however, the opportunity to increase shareowner rights will be weighed against the costs and potential disruption of changing the state of incorporation.<sup>51</sup>

#### OFFSHORE REINCORPORATION: CASE-BY-CASE

In some circumstances the costs of a corporation's reincorporation may outweigh the benefits, primarily tax and other financial advantages. Reincorporation can also result in the loss of shareowner rights, financial penalties, future detrimental tax treatment, litigation, or lost business. The SBA evaluates reincorporation proposals by examining the economic costs and benefits and comparing governance and regulatory provisions between the locations.

#### CONTROL SHARE ACQUISITION PROVISIONS: CASE-BY-CASE

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 set 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 shareowner vote or risk voting disenfranchisement if the bidder continues buying up a large block of shares. SBA supports proposals to opt out of control share acquisition statutes unless doing so would enable the completion of a takeover that would be detrimental to shareowners. SBA opposes proposals to amend the charter to include control share acquisition provisions or limit voting rights.

#### CONTROL SHARE CASH-OUT PROVISIONS: FOR

Control share cash-out statutes give dissident shareowners the right to "cash-out" of their position in a company at the expense of the shareowner who has taken a control position. When an investor crosses a preset threshold level, the remaining shareowners are given the right to sell their shares to the acquirer, who must buy them at the highest acquiring price. SBA typically supports proposals to opt out of control share cash-out statutes.

#### OPT-OUT OF DISGORGEMENT PROVISIONS: FOR

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 (between 18 months and 24 months) prior to the investor's gaining control status are subject to these recapture-of-profits provisions. SBA supports proposals to opt out of state disgorgement provisions.

#### ANTI-GREENMAIL: FOR

Greenmail payments are targeted share repurchases by management of company stock from individuals or groups seeking control of the company. They are one of the most wasteful entrenchment devices available to management. Since only the hostile party receives payment, usually at a substantial premium over the market value of his shares, the practice is discriminatory to all other shareowners of the company. With greenmail, management transfers significant sums of corporate

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<sup>51</sup> Subramanian, Guhan, "The Influence of Anti-takeover Statutes on Incorporation Choice: Evidence on the 'Race' Debate and Anti-takeover Overreaching." Harvard NOM Research Paper No. 01-10, December 2001.

cash to one entity for the purpose of fending off a hostile takeover. SBA supports proposals to adopt anti-greenmail charter or bylaw amendments or otherwise restrict a company's ability to make greenmail payments.

#### FAIR PRICE AND SIMILAR PROVISIONS IN TWO-TIERED TENDER OFFERS: CASE-BY-CASE

SBA supports proposals to adopt a fair price provision if the shareowners' vote requirement embedded in the provisions is no more than a majority of the disinterested shares. The SBA will vote against all other management fair price proposals. SBA also will typically support shareowner proposals to lower the shareowners' vote requirement embedded in existing fair price provisions.

#### FAIR PRICE PROVISION: CASE-BY-CASE

Fair price provisions are a variation on standard supermajority voting requirements for mergers, whereby shareowners vote before a significant business combination can be affected. Fair price provisions add a third option, allowing a bidder to consummate a merger without board approval or a shareowner vote if the offer satisfies the price requirements stipulated in the provision. Fair price provisions are normally adopted as amendments to a corporation's charter. The provisions normally include a super majority lock-in, a clause requiring a super majority shareowner vote to alter or repeal the provisions itself. We typically support management proposals to adopt a fair price provision, if the shareowner vote requirement imbedded in the provision is no more than a majority of the disinterested shares. We generally support shareowner proposals to lower the shareowner vote requirement imbedded in existing fair price provisions.

#### OPT OUT OF ANTI-TAKEOVER LAW: FOR

The SBA does not support corporations opting into state anti-takeover laws (e.g., Delaware). Such laws may prohibit an acquirer from making a well-financed bid for a target, which provides a premium to shareowners. We support proposals to opt out of state anti-takeover laws.

#### APPROVE STAKEHOLDER PROVISIONS: AGAINST

Stakeholder provisions or laws permit directors to weigh the interests of constituencies other than shareowners, including bondholders, employees, creditors, customers, suppliers, the surrounding community, and even society, in the process of corporate decision making. The SBA does not support proposals for the board to consider non-shareowner constituencies or other nonfinancial effects when evaluating making important corporate decisions, such as a merger or business combination.

Evaluating the impact on non-shareowner constituencies provides a board with an explicit basis, approved by the shareowners, which it may invoke to reject a purchase offer that may be attractive in purely financial terms. Some state laws also allow corporate directors to consider non-financial effects, whether the companies have adopted such a charter or bylaw provision. SBA would support proposals to opt-out of such provisions.

## COMPENSATION

Compensation is an area that merits oversight from investors, as it exemplifies the delicate principal-agent relationship between shareowners and directors. Directors create compensation plans, often with the assistance of compensation consultants, which aim to motivate performance and retain management. Ultimately, it is the shareowners that bear the cost of these plans, and as average compensation packages have climbed steadily in value in recent years, shareowners have concern over the level of pay, the lack of disclosure, the role of compensation advisers, and the loyalty of board members to shareowners' interests over those of management. Voting against plans with exorbitant pay or poor design is an important shareowner duty, and engagement with companies on their plans and features is a meaningful way for shareowners to protect value and contribute to oversight of their agents.<sup>52</sup>

### ADOPT OR AMEND STOCK AWARD OR OPTION PLAN: CASE-BY-CASE

The SBA supports compensation structures that provide incentives to directors, managers, and other employees by aligning their performance and economic interests with those of the shareowners. Therefore, we evaluate incentive-based compensation plans on reasonableness of the total cost to shareowners and the incentive aspects of the plan, as well as the overall design and transparency of the program.

Stock-based incentive plans should require some financial risk. Proper and full disclosure is essential for shareowners to assess the degree of pay-for-performance inherent in plans. Some companies disclose metrics and thresholds that are inappropriately low and easy to attain; other companies refrain from disclosing metrics and/or thresholds at all. When there is insufficient disclosure on plan metrics and compensation levels appear out of line with peers or problematic pay practices are used, SBA will not support the plan.

For plans to provide proper incentives, executive compensation should be linked directly with the performance of the business. Typically, companies use peer groups when developing compensation packages to make peer-relative assessments of performance. A company's choice of peers can have a significant impact on the ultimate scope and scale of executive compensation, and in many cases, companies set executive compensation at or above the fiftieth percentile of the peer group.<sup>53</sup> Problematic issuer-developed peer groups may exhibit the following red flags: 1) too many firms listed (more than 15); 2) bias toward "peers" that are substantially larger and/or more profitable;<sup>54</sup> 3) peer groups with unusually high CEO pay, particularly if not direct competitors; 4) groups with too many industries and geographic markets included; and 5) unexplained year-to-year peer group changes. When the basis of compensation uses benchmarks and relative comparisons to an inappropriate peer group selection, SBA is unlikely to support the compensation plan.

When making voting decisions, we look for reasonable compensation levels, both on an absolute basis and relative to peers, alignment between pay and performance, disclosure of performance metrics and thresholds, and fair plan administration practices. We may vote against compensation plans for the following reasons:

- High compensation levels on an absolute or peer-relative basis
- Disconnect between pay and performance
- Poor disclosure of performance metrics, thresholds, and targets
- Heavy reliance on time-based instead of performance-based vesting
- Imbalance between long-term and short-term incentive program payments
- Large, guaranteed payments

<sup>52</sup> CFA Centre for Financial Market Integrity, "The Compensation of Senior Executives at Listed Companies: A Manual for Investors," 2007.

<sup>53</sup> Bizjak, M. John, Lemmon, L. Michael, and Naveen, Lalitha. 2000 "Has the Use of Peer Groups Contributed to Higher Pay and Less Efficient Compensation?"<sup>56</sup> Faulkender, Michael W. and Yang, Jun, "Inside the Black Box: The Role and Composition of Compensation Peer Groups," (March 15, 2007). AFA 2008 New Orleans Meetings Paper.

<sup>54</sup> Albuquerque, Ana M., De Franco, Gus and Verdi, Rodrigo S., "Peer Choice in CEO Compensation," (July 21, 2009). Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1362047>.

- Failure to modify compensation award metrics for accounting adjustments or the impact of stock repurchases (buybacks)
- “Long-term” plans with overly short performance measurement and payout periods
- Excessive severance or single-trigger change-in-control packages
- Plans that cover non-employee consultants or advisors
- Inappropriate peer group selections resulting in outsized or misaligned pay
- Excessive perquisites
- Lack of stock ownership guidelines for executives
- Tax gross-ups, evergreen issues, or option repricing practices are permitted
- Accelerated or unreasonable vesting provisions
- Dividend payments are made or allowed to accrue on unvested or unearned awards
- Lack of an independent compensation committee or egregious consultant practices
- Poor committee response to investor concerns, proposals or engagements, especially insufficient response to recent low vote outcomes on compensation plan items including say-on-pay votes.

#### ADVISORY VOTE ON EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION: CASE-BY-CASE

Say-on-pay votes are required in several markets, including the U.S., U.K., Australia, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, and Spain. These advisory votes allow investors to provide feedback on the administration of a company’s pay program, typically on an annual basis (though in some markets, investors of some companies have voted for lesser frequencies of two or three years). Say-on-pay advisory votes add value because investors can seek accountability if the administration of an approved plan proves to be poor. The combination of compensation plan votes and annual say-on-pay advisory votes allow investors to approve the plans and still weigh in on the actual administration of those plans on a regular basis. SBA uses similar criteria for evaluating say-on-pay proposals as detailed in the “Adopt or amend stock incentive plan” guideline.

#### ADOPT BONUS 162(M) PLAN (U.S.): CASE-BY-CASE

SBA reviews proposals to adopt performance-based cash bonus plans for executives on a case-by-case basis. These plans are put to a shareowner vote to preserve the tax deductibility of compensation in excess of \$1 million for the five most highly compensated executives, pursuant to section 162(m) of the Internal Revenue Code. A vote against these plans does not necessarily prevent the bonus from being paid, but only precludes the ability to take a tax deduction.<sup>55</sup> SBA will vote against these proposals under any of these conditions: misalignment of pay and performance, lack of defined or acceptable performance criteria, or unlimited or excessively high maximum pay-outs.

#### ADOPT OR AMEND EMPLOYEE STOCK PURCHASE PLAN: CASE-BY-CASE

Employee stock purchase plans (ESPP) are normally broad-based equity plans that allow employees to purchase stock via regular payroll deductions, often at a reduced price. Equity-based compensation can be a useful tool in aligning the interests of management and employees with those of the shareowners. ESPPs provide low-cost financing for corporate stock and can improve employee productivity, both of which should, in theory, lead to increased shareowner value. Numerous studies favorably link ESPPs with improved corporate performance.<sup>57</sup> SBA considers the plan’s salient features, such as use of evergreen provisions, purchase limits/discounts, pay deductions, matching contributions, holding requirements, tax deductibility, the size and cost of the plan, as well as the company’s overall use of equity compensation, in making voting decisions. The plan is generally accepted if the combined amount of equity used across all programs is deemed reasonable.

#### LINKING PAY WITH PERFORMANCE: CASE-BY-CASE

These proposals would require the company to closely link pay with performance, using performance measures that are mandated in the proposal language or that must be presented to investors by the company for pre-approval.

<sup>55</sup> “Section 162(m) Requirements, Implications and Practical Concerns,” Exequity, September 2008; 2006 Employee Stock Purchase Plan Report, Equilar, Inc., 2006.

When the performance measures are mandated by the proposal language, SBA typically supports proposals that reasonably and fairly align pay with specific performance metrics, require detailed disclosures, or mandate adherence to fair compensation practices. We are less likely to support proposals that require metrics that are a degree removed from ultimate performance measures, such as proposals that require pay to be linked to performance on specific social mandates, absent a compelling argument for their usage.

SBA supports meaningful investor oversight of executive compensation practices and generally supports proposals requiring shareowner approval of specific performance metrics in equity compensation plans. SBA supports prior disclosure of performance metrics including quantifiable performance measures, numerical formulas, and other payout schedules covering at least a majority of all performance-based compensation awards to any named executive officers.

#### OPTION REPRICING: CASE-BY-CASE, TYPICALLY AGAINST

Option repricing is a contravening of the incentive aspect of plans. If the company has a history of repricing underwater options, SBA is unlikely to vote in support. There are very rare instances where repricing is acceptable, but several strict conditions must be met including a dramatic decline in stock value due to serious macroeconomic or industry-wide concerns and the necessity to reprice options to retain and motivate employees.

#### RECOUP BONUSES OR INCENTIVE COMPENSATION THROUGH CLAWBACK PROVISIONS: CASE-BY-CASE

Most commonly, clawback provisions address situations where the company's restated financial statements show that an executive did not achieve the performance results necessary for the executive to receive a bonus or incentive compensation. SBA recognizes that clawback provisions are an important aspect of performance-based compensation plans. To align executive interests with the interests of shareowners, executives should be compensated for achieving performance benchmarks. Equally, an executive should not be rewarded if he or she does not achieve established performance goals. If restated financial statements reveal that the executive was falsely rewarded, he or she should repay any unjust compensation received.

SBA evaluates these proposals by taking into consideration the impact of the proposal in cases of fraud, misstatement, misconduct, and negligence, whether the company has adopted a formal recoupment policy, and if the company has chronic restatement history or material financial problems.

#### DISCLOSURE OF WORK BY COMPENSATION CONSULTANTS: FOR

External compensation consultants should be independent to ensure that advice is unbiased and uncompromised. Multiple business dealings or significant revenue from the company may impair the independence of a pay consultant's opinions, advice, or recommendations to the compensation committee. The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2010 requires that compensation committees analyze the independence of their compensation consultants and advisers and disclose any conflicts of interest concerning such consultants and advisers. Item 407(e)(3)(iv) of Regulation S-K codifies the SEC's proxy disclosure requirement with respect to compensation consultant conflicts of interest, applicable to proxies filed in 2013 and thereafter.<sup>56</sup> Compensation committees are required to assess whether the consultant's work raises any conflicts of interest and, if so, disclose to investors information about the nature of any such conflict and how the conflict is being addressed.

SBA generally supports proposals seeking disclosure regarding the company, board, or compensation committee's use of compensation consultants, such as company name, business relationships, fees paid, and identification of any potential conflicts of interest. Additionally, compensation consultants should not be eligible as consultants or advisors on any stock incentive plan at the company.

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<sup>56</sup> Securities and Exchange Commission Final Rule, "Listing Standards for Compensation Committees," adopted June 20, 2012, effective July 27, 2012.

### RESTRICT EXECUTIVE PAY: CASE-BY-CASE

SBA supports levels of compensation that are consistent with the goal of aligning management's interests with shareowners' interests. Absolute limits may inhibit the compensation committee's ability to fulfill its duties. When the company's executive compensation and performance have been reasonable and in line with that of peers, SBA is unlikely to support proposals seeking an arbitrary cap.

### HEDGING AND PLEDGING COMPANY STOCK: CASE-BY-CASE

Companies are increasingly adopting policies that prohibit insiders, such as board directors and senior executives, from hedging the value of their company equity or pledging company shares as collateral to margin accounts. Hedging is a strategy to offset or reduce the risk of price fluctuations for an asset or equity. Stock-based compensation or open-market purchases of company stock should serve to align executives' or directors' interests with shareowners. Hedging of company stock through a covered call, 'cashless' collar, forward sale, equity swap, or other derivative transactions can sever the alignment with shareowners' interests. Some researchers have found negative stock price performance associated with certain hedging activities.<sup>57</sup> Pledging of company stock as collateral for a loan may have a detrimental impact on shareowners if the officer or director is forced to sell company stock, for example, to meet a margin call. The forced sale of significant amounts of company stock may negatively impact the company's stock price and may also violate a company's insider trading policies and 10b5-1 trading plans. In addition, pledging of shares may be utilized as part of hedging or monetization strategies that could potentially immunize an executive against economic exposure to the company's stock, even while maintaining voting rights. Such strategies may also serve to significantly alter incentives embedded within long-term compensation plans. SBA generally supports proposals designed to prohibit named executive officers from engaging in derivative or speculative transactions involving company stock, including hedging, holding stock in a margin account, or pledging large amounts of stock as collateral for a loan. SBA will evaluate the company's historical practices, level of disclosure, and current policies on the use of company stock.

### PROHIBIT TAX GROSS-UPS: FOR

Tax gross-ups are reimbursements to senior executives paid by the company to cover an executive's tax liability. Tax gross-ups are an unjustifiably costly practice to shareowners; it generally takes at least \$2.50 and as much as \$4 to cover each \$1 of excise tax that must be "grossed-up."<sup>58</sup> SBA generally supports proposals 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.

### REQUIRE SUPERMAJORITY OF INDEPENDENT BOARD MEMBERS TO APPROVE CEO COMPENSATION: AGAINST

SBA generally votes against proposals to seek approval of an amendment to the bylaws to provide that a company's CEO's compensation must be approved by a supermajority of all independent directors of the board. Proponents of this proposal argue that approval of this proposal would ensure that the company provides a CEO pay package that is widely supported by its independent directors, increasing the likelihood that the company's independent directors are kept informed of and feel shared responsibility for CEO compensation decisions. However, SBA supports the compensation committee members as sufficient to be the knowledgeable arbiters of compensation plan terms, metrics, and pay-outs.

### MANDATORY HOLDING PERIODS: CASE-BY-CASE

SBA supports proposals asking companies to adopt substantial mandatory holding periods for their executives, as well as requiring executives to meet stock ownership retention of at least a majority of shares granted or otherwise transferred in executive compensation arrangements. When making voting decisions, SBA considers whether the company has any holding

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<sup>57</sup> J. Carr Bettis, John M. Bizjak, and Swaminathan L. Kalpathy, "Why Do Insiders Hedge Their Ownership and Options? An Empirical Examination," Social Science Research Network, March 2010.

<sup>58</sup> "New Study on Tax Gross-ups," Risk & Governance Weekly, 12/5/08.

period or officer ownership requirements in place and how actual stock ownership of executive officers compares to the proposal's suggested holding period and the company's present ownership or retention requirements.

### EXECUTIVE SEVERANCE AGREEMENTS OR GOLDEN PARACHUTES: CASE-BY-CASE

SBA examines a variety of factors that influence the voting decision in each circumstance, such as:

- The value of the pay-outs in relation to annual salary plus certain benefits for each covered employee as well as the equity value of the overall transaction;
- The scope of covered employees along with their tenures and positions before and after the transaction, as well as other new or existing employment agreements in connection with the transaction;
- The scope of change in control agreement as it relates to the nature of the transaction;
- The use of tax gross-ups;
- Features that allow accelerated vesting of prior equity awards or automatic removal of performance-based conditions for vesting awards;
- For new or outside executives, the lack of sunset provisions; and
- The type of "trigger" necessary for plan pay-outs. Single triggers involve just a change in control; double triggers require a change in control and termination of employment.

Ideally, a golden parachute should not incentivize the executive to sacrifice ongoing opportunities with the surviving firm and should be triggered by a mechanism that is outside of the control of management. Likewise, careful structuring can enhance shareowner value and result in higher takeover bids; exorbitant pay-outs may discourage acquirers from seeking the company as a target and result in a lower shareowner value. Plans that include excessive potential pay-outs, single triggers, overly broad change in control applications, and/or accelerated vesting features are typically not supported by the SBA. Occasionally, more detrimental features such as single triggers or overly broad application of the plan to lower-level employees may warrant withholding votes from compensation committee members in addition to an against vote on the golden parachute plan. Some research indicates that firms adopting golden parachutes experience reductions in enterprise value, as well as negative abnormal stock returns, both during the inter-volume period of adoption and thereafter.<sup>59</sup>

Some executives may receive provision for severance packages, vested shares, salary, bonuses, perquisites, and pension benefits even after death.<sup>60</sup> Most public companies include death benefits with other types of termination-related pay due their CEOs, with variations for whether the person is fired, becomes disabled or dies in office. Death benefits may be layered on top of pensions, vested stock awards and deferred compensation, which for most CEOs already amount to large sums. Though not all companies provide it, the most common posthumous benefit is acceleration of unvested stock options and grants of restricted stock; these accelerated vesting provisions are not supported by SBA proxy voting guidelines. SBA supports their removal from compensation frameworks.

### SUPPLEMENTAL EXECUTIVE RETIREMENT PLANS (SERPS): CASE-BY-CASE

SERPs are non-qualified, executive-only retirement plans under which the company provides an additional retirement benefit to supplement what is offered under the employee-wide plan where contribution levels are capped. SERPs are different from typical qualified pension plans in two ways. First, they do not receive the favorable tax deductions enjoyed by qualified plans. The company pays taxes on the income it must generate to pay the executive in retirement. Therefore, some critics contend that the executive's tax obligation is shifted to the company. Second, SERPs typically guarantee fixed payments to the executive for life. Unlike defined contribution plans, SERPs transfer the risk of investment performance entirely to the firm. Even if the company or its investment performs poorly, the executive is entitled to receive specified stream of payments.<sup>61</sup> SBA may

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<sup>59</sup> Lucian A Bebchuk, Alma Cohen, and Charles C. Y. Wang, "Golden Parachutes and the Wealth of Shareholders," Harvard Law and Economics Discussion Paper No. 683 (October 2012).

<sup>60</sup> "Companies Promise CEOs Lavish Posthumous Paydays," Wall Street Journal, June 10, 2008.

<sup>61</sup> Bebchuk, Lucian Arye and Fried, Jesse M., "Pay without Performance: Overview of the Issues", Journal of Corporation Law, Vol. 30, No. 4, pp. 647-673, 2005.

Also see Bebchuk, Lucian A., Cohen, Alma, and Spamann, Holger, "The Wages of Failure" (Working Draft, November 22, 2009).

support proposals to limit their usage if there is evidence of abuse in the SERP program or post-employment benefits that indicate the company is operating the program in excess of peers. SBA also supports the limitation of SERP formulas to base compensation, rather than the extension to variable compensation or other enhancements, and we do not endorse the practice of granting additional years of service that were not worked.

#### PRE-ARRANGED TRADING PLANS (10b5-1 PLANS): CASE-BY-CASE

The SBA generally supports proposals calling for certain principles regarding the use of prearranged trading plans (10b5-1 plans) for executives. These principles include:

- Adoption, amendment, or termination of a 10b5-1 Plan are disclosed within two business days in a Form 8-K;
- Amendment or early termination of a 10b5-1 Plan is allowed only under extraordinary circumstances, as determined by the board;
- Multiple, overlapping 10b5-1 plans should be prohibited;
- Plans provide that ninety days 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; and
- Trades under a 10b5-1 Plan must be handled by a broker who does not handle other securities transactions for the executive.

Boards of companies that have adopted 10b5-1 plans should adopt policies covering plan practices, periodically monitor plan transactions, and ensure that company policies cover plan use in the context of guidelines or requirements on equity hedging, pledging, holding, and ownership.

#### DIRECTOR COMPENSATION: CASE-BY-CASE

Non-employee director compensation should be composed of a mix of cash and stock awards, where market practices do not prohibit such a mix. Director compensation plans are evaluated by comparing the cash compensation plus the approximate value of the equity-based compensation per director to a peer group with similar size and enterprise value. The initial compensation that is provided to new directors is also considered. The cash retainer and equity compensation are adequate compensation for board service; therefore, SBA does not support retirement benefits for non-employee directors. We encourage stock ownership by directors and believe directors should own an equity interest in the companies upon which boards they are members. However, we do not support a specific minimum or absolute ownership levels.



## BUSINESS CONDUCT

SBA often engages with companies outside of the proxy voting process, speaking directly to corporate and board representatives about business conduct decisions relevant to shareowner value, such as in the guidelines discussed below. Most of the guidelines in this section cover proposals that are submitted by shareowners rather than management, but these issues impact most companies regardless of whether they have had shareowner proposals submitted. Therefore, engagement is an extremely effective and important tool for mitigating the widespread and systematic risks inherent in these issues.

SBA considers the vote on these proposals to be an important part of the communication process with management. We support these proposals when their adoption seems prudent considering the current circumstances and the proposed actions may reasonably be considered to have a cost-effective, protective impact on shareowner value. These topics cover risks such as product safety, environmental impact, and human rights abuses—areas where investors have experienced significant share value losses over time due to missteps in management of these risks. It is our fiduciary duty to engage companies and make prudent voting decisions in the presence of substantial risks, by supporting reasonable proposals and maintaining a dialogue with companies on these topics.

### PRODUCT SAFETY: CASE-BY-CASE

Inadequate product safety standards can be catastrophic to brand and market value through lost sales, fines, and legal liability. Failure to implement effective safety standards, and to enforce them throughout the supply chain, creates a risk that is difficult to overstate. Generally, SBA supports reasonable proposals requesting increased disclosure regarding oversight procedures, product safety risks, or the use of potentially dangerous or toxic materials in company products. Proposals asking the company to cease using certain production methods or materials will be evaluated based on the merits of the case supporting the actions called for in the proposal. SBA also considers current regulations, recent significant controversy, litigation and/or fines, and the current level of disclosure by the company.

### FACILITY SAFETY (NUCLEAR AND CHEMICAL PLANT SAFETY): CASE-BY-CASE

Resolutions requesting that companies report on risks associated with their operations and/or facilities are examined on a case-by-case basis, by considering the company's compliance with applicable regulations and guidelines; the level of existing disclosure related to security and safety policies, procedures, and compliance monitoring; and the existence of recent, significant violations, fines, or controversy related to the safety and security of the company's operations or facilities.

Some shareowner-sponsored resolutions ask a company to cease production associated with the use of depleted uranium munitions or nuclear weapons components and delivery systems, including disengaging from current and proposed contracts. Such contracts are monitored by government agencies, serve multiple military and non-military uses, and withdrawal from these contracts could have a negative impact on the company's business. SBA evaluates these proposals on a case-by case basis, but generally leaves decisions on the risk of engaging in certain lines of business up to the board, absent compelling a rationale to intervene.

### ANIMAL TESTING AND WELFARE POLICIES: CASE-BY-CASE

Some resolutions ask companies to report on animal welfare conditions or to make changes in procedures relating to the treatment of animals. SBA examines each proposal in the context of current regulations, consumer sentiment, company disclosures, available technology and potential alternatives to the company's present procedures, and the feasibility and cost impact of the proposal when making a voting determination.

### ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT: CASE-BY-CASE

The SBA examines each proposal in the context of current regulations, company practices, and company disclosures when making a voting determination. The SBA evaluates such proposals, considering whether the company has clearly disclosed its

current policies and action plans, as well as an analysis of the potential for regulatory and business risks in their operations. Proposals that request a company engage in specific environmental actions are evaluated on the potential to contribute to improved shareowner value.

## **Marketing, Sales, and Business Policies**

### **RESTRICTIONS ON PRODUCT SALES, PRICING AND MARKETING: CASE-BY-CASE**

Absent compelling arguments that product marketing or pricing has potential to cause damage such as through increased liability or reputational concern, SBA generally allows management to determine appropriate business strategies and marketing tactics.

### **PRIVACY AND CENSORSHIP: CASE-BY-CASE**

As technology has changed, consumers have become more dependent on products that generate significant amounts of personal data, raising concerns over susceptibility to both government surveillance and invasive corporate marketing. In some markets, freedom to access information on the internet is impaired by government decree. Shareowners may make proposals asking companies to limit their own use of consumer-generated data or prohibit access to the data by other entities, such as governments. Proposals may also ask companies to cease certain business lines in countries where governments demand access to the data or the blocking of certain information. Such restrictions may not only violate human rights, but they also decrease the quality of service provided by companies and threaten the integrity of the industry. Proposals may also ask companies to provide reports on their practices and policies related to these concerns.

The SBA generally votes in favor of reasonable, disclosure-based resolutions relating to policies on data collection and internet access, unless the company already meets the disclosure provisions requested in the proposal. SBA considers the level of current applicable disclosure on the topic, the history of stakeholder engagement, nature and scope of the company's operations, applicable legislation, and the company's history of controversy and litigation as it pertains to human rights. SBA generally does not support proposals asking companies to modify or restrict their business operations in certain markets, unless under extraordinary circumstances where a considerable threat to the company's operations or reputation exists.

### **OPERATIONS IN HIGH-RISK MARKETS: CASE-BY-CASE**

Shareowners may propose that companies adopt guidelines for doing business with or investing in countries where there is a pattern of ongoing egregious and systematic violations of human rights. Shareowners of companies operating in regions that are politically unstable, including terrorism-sponsoring states, sometimes propose ceasing operations or re-reporting on operations in high-risk markets. Such concerns focus on how these business activities or investment may, in truth or by perception, support potentially dangerous and/or oppressive governments, and further, may lead to potential company reputational, regulatory, or supply chain risks. In accordance with §215.471(2) of Florida Statutes, the SBA votes against all proposals advocating increased United States trade with Cuba, Syria or Venezuela, and SBA will not vote in favor of any proxy resolution advocating the support of the Maduro regime in Venezuela per resolution of the Trustees of the State Board of Administration. SBA is also prohibited by state law from investing in companies doing certain types of business in Iran and Sudan.

SBA votes on a CASE-BY-CASE basis when evaluating requests to review and report on the company's potential financial and reputation risks associated with operations in high-risk markets, such as a terrorism-sponsoring state or otherwise, considering:

- Compliance with Florida state law;
- Compliance with U.S. sanctions and laws;
- Consideration of other international policies, standards, and laws;
- 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 assessments and risk management procedures; and
- Whether the company has been recently involved in significant controversies or violations in high-risk markets.

### CONFLICT MINERALS: CASE-BY-CASE

As a part of the 2010 Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, the SEC mandates that public companies using 'conflict minerals' annually report on the scope of their due diligence of their suppliers, in addition to making disclosures about any payments made to foreign governments for the acquisition or production of these resources. SBA evaluates the scope of proposals going beyond the reports required by the SEC, as well as the economic rationale, and compares it to the expected compliance costs in making a voting decision.

### POLITICAL NEUTRALITY: CASE-BY-CASE

These resolutions call for companies to maintain political neutrality. They may also propose that appearance of coercion in encouraging its employees to make political contributions be avoided. The SBA examines proposals requesting the company to affirm political non-partisanship in the workplace on a case-by-case basis. We generally vote against such resolutions provided that the company complies with laws governing corporate political activities and the company has procedures in place to ensure that employee contributions to company-sponsored political action committees (PACs) are strictly voluntary and not coercive.

### Codes of Conduct

#### CODES OF CONDUCT: CASE-BY-CASE

Workplace codes of conduct are designed to safeguard workers' rights in the international marketplace. Advocates of workplace codes of conduct encourage corporations to adopt global corporate standards that ensure minimum wages and safe working conditions for workers at in developing countries. U.S. companies that outsource portions of their manufacturing operations to foreign companies are expected to ensure that the products received from those contractors do not involve the use of forced labor, child labor, or sweatshop labor. A number of companies have implemented vendor standards, which include independent monitoring programs with respected local human rights and religious organizations to strengthen compliance with international human rights norms. Failure to manage the risks to workers' safety and human rights can result in boycotts, litigation, and stiff penalties.

When compliance is deemed necessary, SBA favors incorporation of operational monitoring, code enforcement, and robust disclosure mechanisms.<sup>62</sup> SBA prefers to see companies with supply-chain risks proactively engage an independent monitoring organization to provide objective oversight and publicly disclose such evaluation.

### NORTHERN IRELAND (MACBRIDE PRINCIPLES): FOR

The MacBride Principles call on companies with operations in Northern Ireland to promote fair employment practices. Signatories of the MacBride Principles agree to make reasonable, good faith efforts to abolish all differential employment criteria whose effect is discrimination based on religion. SBA supports adoption and implementation of the MacBride Principles, along with fair and transparent employment practices by firms operating in Northern Ireland.

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<sup>62</sup> "Incorporating Labor and Human Rights Risk into Investment Decisions." Aaron Bernstein, Harvard Labor and Worklife Program, Occasional Paper Series No. 2, September 2008.

## MUTUAL FUND VOTING

Like shareowners of publicly held corporations, shareowners of mutual funds are allowed a voice in fund governance. While some funds proscribe annual meetings in their charter documents, all funds must call special meetings of shareowners to amend substantive governance matters such as board composition, investment advisory agreements, distribution agreements, and changes to fundamental investment restrictions. To this end, mutual fund managers issue and solicit proxies like the way that stock corporations do.

Mutual fund proxies raise issues that differ substantially from those found in the proxies of public companies. Though mutual fund proxy holders are also frequently asked to elect trustees and ratify auditors, most of the other agenda items are related to the special nature of this type of security. As with elections of directors of corporations, it is preferable to see mechanisms that promote independence, accountability, responsiveness, and competence regarding the mutual fund. There is evidence demonstrating a positive link between the quality of a mutual fund's board and its future performance and Sharpe ratio.<sup>63</sup> SBA's voting approach on mutual fund resolutions is like that of our approach on publicly traded company resolutions in that votes are cast with an intention of maximizing value and preserving or enhancing investor rights.

### Fund Objective and Structure

The principal investment strategy identifies the financial market asset class or sub-sector in which the fund typically invests, e.g., the fund normally invests at least eighty percent of its assets in stocks included in the S&P 500. A fundamental investment restriction identifies prohibited activities, e.g., the fund may not invest more than twenty-five percent of the value of its total assets in the securities of companies primarily engaged in any one industry.

Beyond a fund's investment objectives, fund structure may also affect shareowner value. Most investment funds are open-end investment companies, meaning that they have no set limit on the number of shares that they may issue. A change in fee structure or fundamental investment policy requires the approval of a majority of outstanding voting securities of the fund, which under the Federal Investment Company Act of 1940 is defined as the affirmative vote of the lesser of either sixty-seven percent or more of the shares of the fund represented at the meeting, if at least 50 percent of all outstanding shares are represented at the meeting, or fifty percent or more of the outstanding shares of the fund entitled to vote at the meeting. Failure to reach this "1940 Act majority" subjects the funds to additional solicitation and administrative expenses.

### ELECTION OF DIRECTORS: CASE-BY-CASE

Like the election of directors of corporations, it is preferable to see mechanisms that promote independence, accountability, responsiveness, and competence within the mutual fund. Votes on director nominees should be determined on a case-by-case basis, considering the following factors:

- Director independence and qualifications, including relevant skills and experience;
- Past performance relative to its peers;
- Board structure;
- Attendance at board and committee meetings;
- Number of mutual funds' boards and/or corporate boards (directorships) upon which a nominee sits; and
- If a proxy contest, Strategy of the incumbents versus the dissidents.

SBA typically withholds votes from directors if:

- They've attended less than 75 percent of the board and committee meetings without a valid reason for the absences;
- They've ignored a shareowner proposal that was approved by a majority of the shares voting;
- They are non-independent directors and sit on the audit or nominating committees;

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<sup>63</sup> Carl R. Chen and Ying Huang, "Mutual Fund Governance and Performance: A Quantile Regression Analysis of Morningstar's Stewardship Grade," *Corporate Governance: An International Review*, 2011, 19(4): 311-333.

- They are non-independent directors, and the full board serves as the audit or nominating committee, or the company does not have one of these committees; or
- The audit committee did not provide annual auditor ratification, especially in the case of substantial non-audit fees or other poor governance practices.

#### CONVERTING CLOSED-END FUND TO OPEN-END FUND: CASE-BY-CASE

The SBA evaluates conversion proposals on a case-by-case basis, considering the following factors:

- Rationale for the change;
- Past performance as a closed-end fund;
- Market in which the fund invests;
- Measures taken by the board to address the discount; and
- Past shareowner activism, board activity, and votes on related proposals.

#### INVESTMENT ADVISORY AGREEMENTS: CASE-BY-CASE

Votes on investment advisory agreements are determined by 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; and
- Assignments (where the advisor undergoes a change of control).

When considering a new investment advisory agreement or an amendment to an existing agreement, the proposed fee schedule should be compared with those fees paid by funds with similar investment objectives. Any increase in advisory fees of more than 10 percent of the prior year's fees are judged to determine the long-term impact on shareowner value, and management must offer a detailed, specific, and compelling argument justifying such a request.

#### APPROVE NEW CLASSES OR SERIES OF SHARES: FOR

The SBA generally votes FOR the establishment of new classes or series of shares. Boards often seek authority for a new class or series of shares for the fund to grow the fund's assets. The ability to create classes of shares enables management to offer different levels of services linked to the class or series of shares that investors purchase. Also, fee structures can be varied and linked to the series of shares, which allows investors to choose the purchasing method best suited to their needs. The board can use separate classes and series of shares to attract a greater number of investors and increase the variety of services offered by the fund.

#### CHANGE FUND'S INVESTMENT OBJECTIVE OR CLASSIFICATION: CASE-BY-CASE

Votes on changes in a fund's objective or classification are determined on a case-by-case basis, considering the following factors:

- Potential competitiveness;
- Current and potential returns;
- Risk of concentration; and
- Consolidation in target industry.

#### AUTHORIZE THE BOARD TO HIRE OR TERMINATE SUB-ADVISORS WITHOUT SHAREOWNER APPROVAL: AGAINST

SBA generally opposes proposals authorizing the board to hire or terminate sub-advisors without shareowner approval. Typically, the management company will seek authority, through the investment advisor, to hire or terminate a new sub-

advisor, modify the length of a contract, or modify the sub-advisory fees on behalf of the fund. These investment decisions are normally made with majority shareowner approval, as determined by Section 15 of the Investment Company Act of 1940. However, funds may apply to the SEC for exemptions to this rule, and the SEC often grants these exemptions. These exemptions are usually structured so that they do not apply to the investment sub-advisory agreement that is in place at the time but apply to any future sub-advisory agreement into which the fund enters.

#### MERGERS: CASE-BY-CASE

The SBA generally evaluates mergers and acquisitions on a case-by-case basis, determining whether the transaction enhances shareowner value by considering:

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

#### CHANGE DOMICILE: CASE-BY-CASE

The SBA votes on fund re-incorporations on a case-by-case basis by considering the regulations and fundamental policies applicable to management investment companies in both states. Shareowner rights can be particularly limited in certain states, including Delaware, Maryland, and Massachusetts.<sup>64</sup>

#### AMENDMENTS TO THE CHARTER: CASE-BY-CASE

The SBA votes on changes to the charter document on a case-by-case basis, considering the following factors:

- The potential impact and/or improvements, including changes to competitiveness or risk;
- The standards within the state of incorporation; and
- Other regulatory standards and implications.

The SBA generally opposes of the following changes:

- Removal of shareowner approval requirement to reorganize or terminate the trust or any of its series;
- Removal of shareowner approval requirement for amendments to the new declaration of trust;
- Removal of shareowner approval requirement to amend the fund's management contract, allowing the contract to be modified by the investment manager and the trust management, as permitted by the 1940 Act;
- Allow the trustees to impose other fees in addition to sales charges on investment in a fund, such as deferred sales charges and redemption fees that may be imposed upon redemption of a fund's shares;
- Removal of shareowner approval requirement to engage in and terminate sub-advisory arrangements; and
- Removal of shareowner approval requirement to change the domicile of the fund.

#### SHAREOWNER PROPOSALS TO ESTABLISH DIRECTOR OWNERSHIP REQUIREMENT: CASE-BY-CASE

The SBA generally favors the establishment of a director ownership requirement and considers a director nominee's investment in the fund as a critical factor in evaluating his or her candidacy. This decision should be made on an individual basis and not according to an inflexible standard. If the director has invested in one fund of the family, he/she is considered to own stock in the fund.

#### SHAREOWNER PROPOSALS TO TERMINATE INVESTMENT ADVISOR: CASE-BY-CASE

Votes on shareowner proposals to terminate the investment advisor considering the following factors:

- Performance of the fund;
- The fund's history of shareowner relations; and

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<sup>64</sup> Lucian Bebchuk and Alma Cohen, "Firms' Decisions Where to Incorporate." National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 9107, August 2002.

- Performance of other funds under the advisor’s management.

**ASSIGN TO THE USUFRUCTUARY (BENEFICIARY), INSTEAD OF THE TRUSTEE, THE VOTING RIGHTS APPURTENANT TO SHARES HELD IN TRUST: CASE-BY-CASE**

The SBA votes against if the company assigns voting rights to a foundation allied to management.

**SHAREOWNER PROPOSALS TO ADOPT A POLICY TO REFRAIN FROM INVESTING IN COMPANIES THAT SUBSTANTIALLY CONTRIBUTE TO GENOCIDE OR CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY: CASE-BY-CASE**

The SBA will evaluate such proposals with an adherence to the requirements and intent of Florida law, including but not limited to the Protecting Florida’s Investments Act, which prohibits investment in companies involved in proscribed activities in Sudan or Iran, and other laws covering companies with policies on or investments in countries such as Cuba, Northern Ireland, and Israel.

