

WACHTELL, LIPTON, ROSEN & KATZ

# COMPENSATION COMMITTEE GUIDE

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## *About This Compensation Committee Guide*

This Compensation Committee Guide (this “Guide”) provides an overview of the key rules applicable to compensation committees of listed U.S. companies and practices that compensation committees should consider in the current environment. This Guide outlines a compensation committee member’s responsibilities, reviews the composition and procedures of the compensation committee, and considers important legal standards and regulations that govern compensation committees and their members. This Guide also recommends specific practices to promote compensation committee effectiveness in designing appropriate compensation programs that advance corporate goals. Although generally geared toward directors who are members of a public company compensation committee, this Guide also is relevant to members of a compensation committee of a private company, especially if the private company may at some point consider accessing the public capital markets.

This Guide contains sample compensation committee charters as Exhibits, which have been updated to reflect the changes required to be made as a result of the implementation by the exchanges of certain provisions of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (“Dodd-Frank”). These Exhibits aim to be useful in assisting a compensation committee in performing its functions. However, it would be a mistake to simply copy published models. The creation of charters requires experience and careful thought. It is not necessary that a company have every guideline and procedure that another company has to be “state of the art” in its governance practices. When taken too far, an overly broad committee charter can be counterproductive. For example, if a charter explicitly requires review or other action and the compensation committee has not taken that action, the failure may be considered evidence of lack of due care. Each company should tailor its compensation committee charter and written procedures to what is necessary and practical for the particular company.

This Guide is not intended as legal advice, cannot take into account particular facts and circumstances and generally does not address individual state corporate laws.

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# Compensation Committee Guide

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## **EXHIBITS**

- Exhibit A* Compensation Committee Charter (NYSE-Listed Company)
- Exhibit B* Compensation Committee Charter (NASDAQ-Listed Company)

## Introduction

The past year in executive compensation has been marked by two continuing trends: (1) a continuing refinement of conceptions of so-called “best practices” advocated by certain shareholders and responses to those refinements by compensation committees, most notably in the context of the nonbinding, advisory “say-on-pay” vote required by Dodd-Frank, and (2) an increased desire by corporations to engage with shareholders to reassure them of the appropriateness of such responses and to engage in a dialogue regarding the corporation’s compensation arrangements generally. Against this backdrop, the key challenge for compensation committee members has been to continue to approve compensation programs that directors believe are right for their corporations while maintaining a sufficient understanding of shareholder views and communicating the appropriateness of their arrangements to avoid challenges and criticism that could undermine directors’ abilities to act in their company’s best interest.

Compensation committees should design compensation programs with great care, focusing first and foremost on the incentives that the programs promote. Directors should also bear in mind the heightened sensitivity to pay packages that could be deemed “excessive.” This is particularly true in today’s environment, which has witnessed a marked increase in litigation on executive compensation matters, a trend we expect will continue at least in the short run. All this said, a compensation committee that follows normal procedures and considers the advice of legal counsel and an independent consultant should not fear being second-guessed by the courts, which continue to respect compensation decisions so long as the directors act on an informed basis, in good faith and not in their personal self-interest. In the final analysis, the ability to recruit and retain highly qualified executives is essential to the long-term success of a company.

Given the ongoing shift in the corporate governance landscape, there is a continuing focus by directors on the proper role of a compensation committee. This Guide describes the duties of compensation committee members and provides information to enable them to function most effectively. This Guide begins with a discussion of the responsibilities of the compensation committee and the fiduciary duties of its members. It then outlines different means of compensating executives and the tax and other rules that apply to compensation arrangements. A discussion of change-in-control arrangements follows the discussion of types of compensation. The next section of this Guide focuses on shareholder proposals, relations and litigation, including a discussion of say-on-pay votes and the ongoing influence of proxy advisory firms. This Guide next examines regulation of compensation at financial institutions. The discussion then shifts to compensation committee composition, compensation committee meetings

and compensation committee charters. Finally, this Guide addresses the compensation of directors.

This edition of this Guide has been updated to reflect the current environment. Significant updates include:

- an updated discussion of the say-on-pay voting process, including a review of the first four years of actual votes; and
- an updated discussion of the new compensation-related shareholder advisory firm voting guidance and the increasing role of shareholder engagement.

## I

### **Key Responsibilities of Compensation Committee Members**

The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (“SEC”), the New York Stock Exchange (the “NYSE”) and the NASDAQ Stock Market (the “NASDAQ”) require a publicly held company to have a compensation committee that assumes a number of compensation-related responsibilities. It also is advisable for compensation committees to assume certain additional responsibilities. It is important, therefore, that a compensation committee understand what is expected of it, and that it be diligent in ensuring that it appropriately and faithfully fulfills its mandate.

#### **A. Responsibilities Imposed by the Securities Markets and Dodd-Frank**

##### **1. New York Stock Exchange Requirements**

The NYSE requires that all listed companies subject to its corporate governance listing standards have a compensation committee composed entirely of independent directors<sup>1</sup> with a written committee charter that addresses all of the duties described in this section.<sup>2</sup> The NYSE further requires that the compensation committee carry out a number of minimum responsibilities. While the responsibilities of a compensation committee may be delegated to subcommittees, each subcommittee still must be composed entirely of independent directors and also have a published charter.<sup>3</sup>

Under the NYSE rules, a compensation committee must (a) review and approve goals and objectives relevant to the chief executive officer (“CEO”) compensation, (b) evaluate the CEO’s performance in light of such goals and objectives, and (c) either as a committee or together with the other independent directors determine and approve the CEO’s compensation based upon such evaluation. In determining the long-term incentive component of CEO compensation, the NYSE suggests that a com-

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<sup>1</sup> The NYSE definition of “independent” is explored in detail in Chapter VIII of this Guide.

<sup>2</sup> Under the NYSE corporate governance rules, an NYSE-listed company is required to maintain a website that must include, among other things, a printable version of its compensation committee (and any subcommittee thereof) charter. *See* NYSE Listed Company Manual Section 303A.05.

<sup>3</sup> A listed company of which more than 50% of the voting power for the election of directors is held by an individual, a group or another company (known as a “controlled company”) is exempt from these requirements.

compensation committee consider (1) the company's performance and relative shareholder return, (2) the value of similar incentive awards to CEOs at comparable companies, and (3) the awards given to the CEO in past years.<sup>4</sup> Compensation committee responsibilities regarding CEO compensation do not preclude discussion of CEO compensation with the board of directors generally.

In addition, under the NYSE rules, a compensation committee must recommend non-CEO executive officer compensation to the board of directors. This requirement means that a listed company's compensation committee must recommend compensation of the president, principal financial officer (the "CFO"), principal accounting officer (or, if there is no principal accounting officer, the controller), any vice president of a principal business unit, division or function (such as sales, administration or finance), any other officer who performs a policy-making function or any other person who performs similar policy-making functions. A compensation committee also is charged with recommending to the board of directors the approval of incentive and equity-based compensation plans that are subject to the board of directors approval. Additionally, the NYSE reiterates and adopts the SEC requirement that a compensation committee produce a report on executive officer compensation required to be included in the listed company's annual proxy statement or annual report on Form 10-K.

Under the NYSE listing standards adopted in response to Dodd-Frank, the compensation committee may, in its sole discretion, retain or obtain the advice of a compensation consultant, independent legal counsel or other adviser, and is directly responsible for the appointment, compensation and oversight of that adviser's work. The company must provide for appropriate funding, as determined by the compensation committee, for payment of reasonable compensation to the adviser. Prior to retaining an adviser (other than in-house legal counsel or an adviser that consults on broad-based plans that do not discriminate in favor of executive officers or directors), the compensation committee must, subject to limited exceptions, take into consideration all factors relevant to that adviser's independence from management, including (1) whether the adviser's firm provides other services to the company; (2) the amount of fees from the company received by the adviser's firm relative to the total revenue of the adviser's

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<sup>4</sup> The NYSE clarifies that a compensation committee is not precluded from approving awards so as to comply with applicable tax laws, such as Section 162(m) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended (the "Code"), with or without ratification by the board of directors. A further discussion of certain implications of Section 162(m) of the Code is set forth in Chapter IV of this Guide.



firm; (3) conflict-of-interest policies of the adviser's firm; (4) any business or personal relationships between the adviser and members of the compensation committee; (5) any stock of the company owned by the adviser; and (6) any relationships between the adviser or the adviser's firm and an executive officer of the company. These rules do not require the compensation committee to retain only independent advisers; rather, they mandate that the compensation committee consider the above six factors (and any other factors, if relevant) before selecting an adviser.

Lastly, a compensation committee must conduct an annual self-evaluation of its performance. Many consulting firms have published their recommended forms and procedures for conducting these evaluations. Consultants also have established advisory services to assist a committee with the evaluation process. A compensation committee must decide how to conduct its evaluation. In making the decision, it is not required that the directors receive outside assistance, and no specific method of evaluation is prescribed. A compensation committee may elect to do the evaluation by discussions at meetings. Documents and minutes created as part of the evaluation process are not privileged, and care should be taken not to create ambiguous records that may be used in litigation against the company and its directors.<sup>5</sup>

## **2. NASDAQ Requirements**

Under NASDAQ listing standards adopted in response to Dodd-Frank, NASDAQ-listed companies are now required to have a compensation committee consisting of at least two independent directors. The independence requirements under the NASDAQ rules are discussed in Chapter VIII of this Guide.

The CEO is prohibited from attending meetings while the compensation committee members are deliberating or voting on the CEO's compensation. NASDAQ places no such restriction on other executive officer attendance and does not prohibit the attendance of the CEO during compensation committee discussions concerning other executive officer compensation.

NASDAQ provides, however, that, if a compensation committee is composed of at least three members, then, under exceptional and limited circumstances and if certain conditions are met, one director who is not inde-

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<sup>5</sup> For a brief discussion of the factors a compensation committee should consider in its annual self-evaluation, *see* Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz, *Nominating and Corporate Governance Committee Guide*, Part Two, Ch. XI (2015).

pendent under its rules may be appointed to the compensation committee without disqualifying the compensation committee from considering the compensation matters that could ordinarily be entrusted to it had it been fully independent.<sup>6</sup> In addition, a compensation committee or a company's independent directors must approve equity compensation arrangements that are exempted from the NASDAQ shareholder approval requirement as a prerequisite to taking advantage of such exemption.<sup>7</sup>

As with the NYSE rules, NASDAQ rules provide that the compensation committee may, in its sole discretion, retain or obtain the advice of a compensation consultant, independent legal counsel or other adviser, and is directly responsible for the appointment, compensation and oversight of that adviser's work. The company must provide for appropriate funding, as determined by the compensation committee, for payment of reasonable compensation to the adviser. NASDAQ rules require the compensation committee to consider the six factors described in Section A.1 of this Chapter I, but do not expressly require the compensation committee to take into consideration all of the factors relevant to an adviser's independence from management.

NASDAQ now requires the compensation committee to have a formal charter, as described in greater detail in Chapter X of this Guide.

## **B. CEO and Executive Officer Compensation**

While both the NYSE and the NASDAQ only require that a compensation committee recommend to the full board of directors non-CEO executive officer compensation, vesting complete authority in the compensation committee for such individuals is advisable given the requirements of Section 162(m) of the Code, the insider trading short-swing profit safe harbor of Rule 16b-3 under Section 16(b) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended (the "Exchange Act"), and state law fiduciary duty jurisprudence, all of which provide substantial incentives for the compensation of executive officers to be determined by a committee of independent directors. A detailed discussion of the requirements of Section 162(m) of the Code and Rule 16b-3 under the Exchange Act is set forth in Chapters IV and VIII of this Guide.

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<sup>6</sup> The specific conditions that must be met for such exemption to be available, as well as the precise contours of the NASDAQ definition of "independent," are discussed in Chapter VIII of this Guide.

<sup>7</sup> The shareholder approval requirements and the relevant exemptions for certain compensation committee approved plans are discussed in Chapter IV of this Guide.

In evaluating and setting executive officer compensation, a compensation committee should be deliberative and guided by its established compensation policy. If compensation levels are linked to the satisfaction of predetermined performance criteria, a compensation committee should discuss whether, and to what degree, the criteria have been satisfied. In addition, as more fully discussed in Chapter IV of this Guide, it may be necessary for a compensation committee to certify satisfaction of such performance criteria to comply with the tax deductibility requirements of Section 162(m) of the Code.

Further, to help ensure that compensation and severance packages are justifiable, members of a compensation committee should fully understand the costs and benefits of the compensation arrangements that they are considering. Particular attention should be paid to severance arrangements and to all benefits provided to senior management in connection with termination of employment, as well as the impact of a change in control of the corporation on equity incentives and other compensation arrangements. It may be useful for a compensation committee to utilize a tally sheet, which provides a concise breakdown of the various components of a given executive officer's compensation package in scenarios which include continued employment, termination of employment and change in control of the corporation.

### **C. Non-Executive Officer Compensation and Broad-Based "ERISA" Plans**

There is no particular allocation of responsibilities for the compensation and benefits of a company's employees that is right for every company. Companies should consider whether the compensation committee will have responsibility for employee compensation beyond that of executive officers. In addition, companies should consider whether the compensation committee will have responsibility for risk oversight in incentive compensation plans for all employees, as discussed in Section I below.<sup>8</sup> Limiting a compensation committee's responsibility to executive officer compensation may make sense for many companies so that directors can concentrate their limited time and resources on establishing proper incentives for those employees who are most likely to influence company performance. However, companies should be mindful that due to increased focus on pay ratios and shareholder litigation surrounding compensation issues generally, it may be useful for compensation committees to increase their oversight of total compensation expenditures (*e.g.*, bonus compensation in financial institutions). Ultimately, the full board of directors is

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<sup>8</sup> See Section I of this Chapter I.

charged with allocating compensation responsibilities, but the compensation committee may be best equipped to make recommendations to the full board of directors concerning the compensation committee's scope of responsibility.

As noted in Chapter II of this Guide, a compensation committee also may have fiduciary responsibilities under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, as amended ("ERISA"), for certain broad-based employee benefit plans, either as a result of language in plan documents or the compensation committee's own charter, or by virtue of actually exercising such responsibilities. It is possible for a plan to state that the full board of directors or the compensation committee is responsible for administering ERISA plans or for managing the investment of their assets, either of which will implicate ERISA's fiduciary duty rules. It may or may not be appropriate for a compensation committee to assume such responsibilities, but, in any event, companies should ensure that the documentation and actual exercise of fiduciary responsibilities are consistent, and that all who are ERISA fiduciaries are aware of that fact and understand the legal responsibilities it entails. ERISA places special emphasis on "procedural prudence," so it is important for ERISA fiduciaries to follow appropriate procedures, to have full access to all necessary information and expert advice pertaining to their duties, and to keep careful records of their deliberations, decisions and actions when acting in a fiduciary capacity. In addition, it is critically important that ERISA fiduciaries be sensitive to the possibility that their ERISA duties and their responsibilities to the shareholders may conflict, presenting special legal issues that must be addressed. These issues are particularly difficult when assets of an ERISA plan are invested in company stock (as is the case for employee stock ownership plans ("ESOPs") and many 401(k) plans). Obtaining and maintaining an appropriate level of ERISA fiduciary insurance is highly recommended.

#### **D. Development of Compensation Philosophy**

A compensation committee must develop a compensation policy tailored to the company's specific business objectives in order to evaluate, determine and meet executive compensation goals. It should be noted that a compensation policy not only makes good business sense, but the SEC requirements for the Compensation Discussion & Analysis section of the annual proxy statement (the "CD&A") require discussion of such a policy.

#### **E. Compensation-Related Disclosure Responsibilities**

A compensation committee should oversee compliance with all compensation-related disclosure requirements. Such compliance presents a significant challenge in light of the comprehensive SEC rules regarding disclo-

sure of executive officer and director compensation. Compensation committee members should request that management review with them (1) potential disclosures that may be required in connection with compensation-related actions, including the timing requirements for any such disclosure, and (2) the nature of the information to be disclosed in upcoming public filings, including information relating to the compensation committee members themselves. Importantly, under current SEC guidance, a company that receives an SEC comment letter due to noncompliance with executive compensation disclosure rules will have to amend any materially noncompliant filings. Set forth below are the principal components of the executive compensation disclosure required each year.

## **1. Compensation Discussion and Analysis**

The CD&A provides investors with material information necessary for an understanding of a company's compensation policies and decisions regarding the named executive officers ("NEOs"), which generally include the CEO, the CFO and the three most highly compensated executive officers other than the CFO and CEO. In particular, the CD&A must explain the rationale behind all material elements of "Named Executive Officer" (NEO) compensation, including the overall objectives of the compensation programs and the rationale underlying and method of determining specific amounts for each element of compensation. Under Dodd-Frank, a company also must address in its CD&A whether (and if so, how) the company has considered the results of the most recent say-on-pay vote in determining compensation policies and decisions.

The CD&A is considered "filed" with the SEC; accordingly, misleading statements in the CD&A expose a company to liability under Section 18 of the Exchange Act. In addition, to the extent that the CD&A is included or incorporated by reference into a periodic report, the disclosure is covered by the CEO and CFO certifications required by the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 ("Sarbanes-Oxley"). If forward-looking information is included in the CD&A, a company may rely on the safe harbors for such information.

## **2. Compensation Committee Report**

A company must include a Compensation Committee Report in its proxy statement and its annual report on Form 10-K (incorporation by reference into the Form 10-K from the proxy statement is permitted). The Compensation Committee Report recites whether a compensation committee has reviewed the CD&A, discussed it with management and recommended it to the board of directors. The names of the compensation committee members must appear below the report. To help ensure the accuracy of the Compensation Committee Report, the compensation committee should

have detailed discussions with management concerning the CD&A in advance of the filing deadline.

### **3. Additional Annual Disclosure Regarding NEO Compensation**

The SEC rules require quantitative elements of executive compensation of NEOs to be disclosed in tabular format, together with narrative explanations and footnotes that describe the quantitative disclosure. The central component of the tabular disclosure is the Summary Compensation Table, which discloses, by category, all compensation earned by each NEO during the prior fiscal year, including compensation attributable to salary, bonus, equity awards, change in pension value, earnings on nonqualified deferred compensation, and perquisites.

Other required tables provide detailed information regarding:

- equity awards and bonus award opportunities granted to NEOs during the last fiscal year;
- outstanding equity awards at the end of the last fiscal year, including vesting schedule and exercise price, to the extent applicable;
- stock options that NEOs have exercised during the last fiscal year and NEO stock awards that have vested during the last fiscal year;
- pension plan participation by NEOs, including accumulated benefits and any payments during the last fiscal year; and
- NEO participation in deferred compensation plans, including executive and company contributions, earnings, withdrawals, distributions, and the aggregate balance at the last fiscal year end.

Finally, companies must describe the circumstances in which an NEO may be entitled to payments and/or benefits upon termination of employment and/or in connection with a change in control and quantify the value of those payments and benefits as of fiscal year end. As discussed in greater detail below, companies may wish to consider utilizing in their annual proxy statements the format prescribed by Dodd-Frank for disclosing and quantifying change-in-control protections in proxy statements relating to corporate transactions.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Section A.3 of Chapter VI of this Guide.

#### **4. Director Compensation Table**

The SEC rules also require a Director Compensation Table that must provide disclosure regarding director compensation during the prior fiscal year that is comparable to the Summary Compensation Table for NEOs, including disclosure with respect to perquisites, consulting fees and payments or promises in connection with director legacy and charitable award programs.

#### **5. Compensation Committee Governance**

Narrative disclosure regarding the governance of a compensation committee is also required by SEC rules. The narrative disclosure must describe a company's processes for determining executive and director compensation, including: the scope of authority of the compensation committee; the extent to which the compensation committee may delegate its authority; and any role of executive officers and/or compensation consultants in making determinations regarding executive and/or director compensation. If compensation consultants play a role in determining executive and/or director compensation, a company must identify the consultants, state whether they are engaged directly by the compensation committee, and describe the nature and scope of their assignment.

#### **6. Compensation Consultants and Advisers**

Existing SEC rules require annual disclosure of the role of compensation consultants in determining or recommending executive and director compensation, including:

- the identity of consultants engaged;
- whether the consultants were engaged directly by the compensation committee;
- the nature and scope of the assignment; and
- under certain circumstances, the value of the services provided.

Dodd-Frank added another layer of requirements relating to compensation consultants. The SEC adopted rules for these additional requirements in 2012. Under these rules, a company must disclose whether the work of a compensation consultant who played any role in determining or recommending the form or amount of executive and director compensation raised any conflicts of interest, the nature of any such conflicts and how the conflicts are being addressed.

## **7. Risk and Broad-Based Compensation Programs**

To the extent that risks arising from a company's compensation programs for employees generally (not just executives) are reasonably likely to have a material adverse effect on the company, the SEC rules require a stand-alone discussion in the annual proxy, independent from the CD&A, of the company's compensation programs as they relate to risk management and risk-taking incentives. The threshold under the rules—reasonably likely to have a material adverse effect—sets a high bar for disclosure. A company should engage in a systematic process involving participants from its human resources, legal and finance departments, in which it (1) identifies company incentive compensation plans, (2) assesses the plans to determine if they create undesired or unintentional risk of a material nature, taking into account any mitigating factors, and (3) documents the process and conclusions. If a company concludes that its programs are not reasonably likely to have a material adverse effect, no disclosure is required, although, as a practical matter, it may be warranted because Institutional Shareholder Services (“ISS”) has encouraged disclosure about the review process and the company's conclusions and, to the extent no disclosure is provided, the SEC may seek confirmation from the company that the risk review was done and it was determined that disclosure was not required. While the compensation committee need not be involved in the evaluation of risk as applied to incentive compensation arrangements themselves, the compensation committee should satisfy itself that management has designed and implemented appropriate processes to make such evaluations.

## **8. Implementation of Dodd-Frank Disclosure Requirements**

A handful of disclosure requirements under Dodd-Frank remain that have yet to be implemented. In particular, Dodd-Frank mandates annual proxy disclosure relating to the relationship between executive compensation and financial performance, as well as annual disclosure about whether employees or directors may engage in hedging transactions on company stock. The SEC had yet to issue final rules in these areas, although it did issue proposed rules on hedging disclosure in February 2015.

In addition, Dodd-Frank requires annual disclosure of the ratio between the CEO's compensation and the median compensation of all other employees. While the SEC has yet to issue final rules implementing this mandate, it did propose rules in 2013, which have been the subject of extensive comments. See our client [memorandum](#) dated September 18, 2013 for a summary and discussion of the proposed rules.



## **9. Conclusion**

The importance of clear, thorough compensation disclosure that effectively conveys the business rationale for executive compensation decisions is greater than ever, due to the significant attention from the SEC, media and corporate governance activists, and the imposition of mandatory say-on-pay. Companies should expect heightened focus on, and accordingly clearly explain the basis for, pay levels, termination and change-in-control payments, benchmarking practices, the existence and nature of compensation clawback policies and the relationship between particular compensation arrangements and risk.

### **F. Internal Controls**

As part of the compensation committee's responsibility to oversee compliance with legal rules affecting compensation, it should oversee compensation disclosure procedures and the company's compensation-related internal controls. Companies should supplement disclosure controls and internal controls with a system to track and gather the information required under the compensation disclosure rules. Individuals to be included in the Summary Compensation Table must be determined by reference to total compensation (excluding the amounts included in the change in pension value and nonqualified deferred compensation columns). As such, companies should make sure that they have systems in place to track all of the includible components of compensation for their executive officers, including the value of perquisites, tax gross-ups and amounts paid/accrued in connection with a termination of employment or a change in control, as well as to track "specified employees" within the meaning of Section 409A of the Internal Revenue Code.

### **G. Equity Compensation Grant Policy**

Companies should review the manner in which equity compensation awards are granted to employees and directors. While any given company's equity grant practices will be tailored to the company's particular business and administrative needs, each company should consider establishing a written equity compensation award grant policy that complies with, and specifies that grants will be made in accordance with, state law, the compensation committee charter and the applicable equity compensation plans. All parties involved in the granting of awards should be provided with copies of the policy and should familiarize themselves with its key terms. Note, however, that certain shareholder advisory firms, such as ISS, no longer take into account policies (such as burn rate commitment policies or guidelines proffered by companies) in analyzing compensation-related shareholder proposals.

## **H. Management Succession**

The board of directors' role in selecting and evaluating the CEO and senior leadership, and planning for succession, is a critical element of the company's strategic plan and should be approached with an "expect the unexpected" mindset. A leadership gap can undermine confidence in the future of the company as well as the company's ability to navigate immediate and evolving challenges.

To the extent that a company has not given responsibility for succession issues to the nominating and governance committee, companies should consider charging the compensation committee with the responsibility of ensuring the existence of an appropriate management development and succession strategy. In addition to safeguarding against a leadership vacuum, careful succession planning is an excellent way to meet compensation challenges, as studies indicate that it is considerably more expensive to recruit senior talent from outside an organization than from inside, and pay packages for outside recruits are often more publicized and scrutinized than compensation arrangements for internal candidates. This can be especially true if CEO succession arises out of a reaction to a crisis, rather than as a result of controlled planning.

There are no prescribed procedures for planning succession; therefore, a board of directors should review succession plans on a regular rather than reactive basis. Ultimately, the integrity, dedication and competence of the CEO and senior management are critical to the success of a company, and the board of directors should take care to implement a sensible, company-specific succession plan.

## **I. Role of Risk in Compensation Programs**

### **1. The Role of the Compensation Committee in Risk Oversight of Incentive Compensation**

The public and political perception that undue risk taking was central to the financial crisis has fueled an extensive legislative and regulatory focus on risk management and risk prevention. The SEC has adopted disclosure rules that require discussion in proxy statements of the board of directors' role in overseeing risk and the relationship between a company's overall employee compensation policies and risk management. Risk management and compensation have also received heightened focus from shareholder activists and other "good governance" proponents, such as ISS. In addition, the regulatory framework applicable to financial institutions requires all financial institutions to evaluate incentive compensation and related risk management, controls and governance processes, and to address deficiencies or processes inconsistent with safety and soundness.

Given these developments, risk oversight of incentive compensation arrangements should be a priority for all compensation committees. While the compensation committee cannot and should not be involved in actual day-to-day risk *management* as applied to incentive compensation arrangements, directors should, through their risk *oversight* role, satisfy themselves that management has designed and implemented risk management processes that (1) evaluate the nature of the risks inherent in compensation programs, (2) are consistent with the company's corporate strategy, and (3) foster a culture of risk-aware and risk-adjusted decision-making throughout the organization.

As noted above, the compensation committee generally is responsible for setting compensation of executive officers. However, the potential for excessive risk in incentive compensation programs is not limited to programs that cover executive officers. Accordingly, we generally recommend that the compensation committee receive reports related to the identification and mitigation of excessive risks in programs for non-executive officers as well as executive officers, and, as described in Chapter VII of this Guide, the regulations applicable to financial institutions require board approval on a broader scale.

Risk in incentive compensation programs cannot be examined in isolation. In overseeing risk in incentive compensation programs, the compensation committee should take into account the company's overall risk management system and tolerance for risk throughout the organization and should discuss with members of the committee charged with risk oversight the most material risks facing the business. Companies may wish to consider including on the compensation committee a member of the audit or other committee that oversees risk generally. Through a coordinated approach, the board of directors can satisfy itself as to the adequacy of the risk oversight function and understand the company's overall risk exposures.

The ability of the compensation committee to perform its oversight role effectively is, to a large extent, dependent upon the flow of information among the directors, senior management and the risk managers in the company. Compensation committee members need to receive sufficient information with respect to the material risk exposures affecting the company and the risk management strategies, procedures and infrastructure designed to address them.

Businesses necessarily incur risk in the pursuit of profits, and excessive risk aversion can be harmful to essential corporate goals. Moreover, the field of risk analysis as applied to compensation programs is an emerging one in which the most successful techniques are still evolving and disagreement exists as to some of the most fundamental questions. Nevertheless, the assessment of risk in incentive compensation arrangements, the

accurate calculation of the appropriate way to reward risk, and the prudent mitigation of risk should be incorporated into the design of all incentive compensation arrangements. Risk reviews of incentive compensation arrangements should attempt to ensure that the level of risk embedded in incentive compensation arrangements is not excessive and is consistent with the corporation's articulated strategy.

## **2. Management's Risk Analysis**

Risk analysis of incentive compensation programs often begins with assembling a risk-identification team. The team should include representatives from business units, as well as the human resources, legal, audit, finance and, if applicable, risk management departments. By establishing an integrated cross-disciplinary team, management can help ensure that there is adequate expertise and information flow across different corporate functions and business units.

Once a company establishes its risk identification team, the team should inventory existing incentive compensation programs. As noted above, plans subject to risk review should include those that cover individuals or groups of employees, whether or not they are executive officers, who have the ability to materially influence financial results.

After identifying the relevant incentive compensation programs, management should consider the range of material risks inherent to its businesses, as well as the time horizons over which those risks may materialize. Relevant risks may include risks related to operations, finance, liquidity, markets, counterparties, legal issues, compliance and misconduct, among others. Management should understand risks that have a small probability of being realized but would be disastrous if they occurred.

Once management has identified risk factors, a company can consider the individual variables of the relevant compensation programs that may increase and decrease risk. The following is a non-exhaustive list of some of the features that may impact the risk profile of an incentive compensation program.

- The number of participants in each program

**Less Risk**  
Fewer participants

**More Risk**  
More participants

- The plan metrics

**Less Risk**

Risk-adjusted metrics (*e.g.*, economic profit)

Multiple metrics

Negative discretion

Based on general performance of corporation or business unit

**More Risk**

Revenue or transaction-based metrics

Single metric

No discretion

Based solely on revenue or profit generated by employee

- Measurement, determination and adjustment of payout

**Less Risk**

Smaller aggregate and individual payouts

Tiered goals and award levels with narrower bands and/or increments

Capped payout

Longer performance period

Deferred payout

Clawback

**More Risk**

Larger aggregate and individual payouts

All or nothing goals, larger increments and narrower range between threshold and maximum performance

Uncapped payout

Shorter performance period

No deferral of payout

No clawback

- The maximum amount of potential revenue and potential losses or liabilities that could result from the businesses covered by the program and/or the plan

**Less Risk**

Small revenue, potential losses, liabilities or payout

**More Risk**

Large revenue, potential losses, liabilities or payout

After management has identified any programs that could incentivize employees to assume excessive risks, management should consider risk miti-

gation techniques to calibrate those programs to the risk profile of the organization. Management should periodically update the compensation committee on its efforts in this regard. Below is a non-exhaustive list of potential mitigation tactics.

*Lengthen Performance Period or Implement Clawbacks.* Consider implementing a performance and/or vesting period that is as long as the time horizon of risk. Alternatively, permit compensation clawbacks during the risk time horizon.<sup>10</sup> Note that vesting of at least one year for at least 95% of awards granted under a plan, and clawbacks, are both factors that ISS considers when making voting recommendations under its new “Equity Plan Scorecard” approach (discussed in Chapter VI).

*Deferral of Payment/Transferability of Stock.* Consider deferring payment, or implementing holding periods or transferability restrictions on stock, until after the time horizon of risks has elapsed. Consider adjusting compensation during the deferral period to reflect actual losses or other manifestations of bad performance. Deferral of awards may be most effective where risks, or the time horizon of risks, are difficult to identify or quantify. Stock ownership requirements imposed on senior executives are another factor ISS considers under its scorecard.

*Calibrate Payouts to Account for Risk.* If two activities generate the same amount of revenue or profits and the risk associated with one activity is materially different from the other, consider whether the payouts under the incentive programs generated by each of the activities should differ, all else being equal. This method of adjustment may be most effective where risks associated with a particular activity are easily quantified.

*De-Leverage Payouts.* The rate at which compensation increases for attainment of goals in excess of threshold performance should be decreased such that there are payouts for a broader range of results but payouts are not supercharged for above target performance or completely denied for below target performance.

*Governance Adjustments.* Companies should strengthen internal controls and governance processes in the design, implementation and monitoring of incentive compensation arrangements.

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<sup>10</sup> For more on clawbacks, *see* Section E of Chapter III of this Guide.

## II

### Fiduciary Duties of Compensation Committee Members

#### A. Fiduciary Duties Generally

Decisions by members of compensation committees with respect to executive compensation generally are subject to the business judgment rule.<sup>11</sup>

##### 1. Business Judgment Rule

Under the business judgment rule, directors' decisions are presumed to have been made on an informed basis, in good faith and in the honest belief that the action taken was in the best interests of the company. Under this presumption, directors' decisions will not be disturbed unless a plaintiff is able to carry its burden of proof in showing that a board of directors has not met its duty of care or loyalty.<sup>12</sup>

##### a. Duty of Care

The core of the duty of care may be characterized as the directors' obligation to act on an informed basis after due consideration of the relevant materials and appropriate deliberation, including the input of experts.<sup>13</sup> To

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<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., *In re The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc. Shareholder Litigation*, C.A. 5215-VCG (Del. Ch. Oct. 12, 2011); *Campbell v. Potash Corp. of Saskatchewan, Inc.*, 238 F.3d 792, 800 (6th Cir. 2001) (“evaluating the costs and benefits of golden parachutes is quintessentially a job for corporate boards, and not for federal courts”).

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., *Aronson v. Lewis*, 473 A.2d 805, 812 (Del. 1984). Under 8 Del. Code Ann. § 102(b)(7), a Delaware company may in its certificate of incorporation either eliminate or limit the personal liability of a director to the company or its shareholders for monetary damages for breach of fiduciary duty, but such provisions may not eliminate or limit the liability of a director for, among other things, (1) breach of the director's duty of loyalty to the company and its shareholders or (2) acts or omissions not in good faith or that involve intentional misconduct or a knowing violation of law. Many Delaware corporations either have eliminated or limited director liability to the extent permitted by law. The Delaware Supreme Court has ruled that the typical Delaware corporation charter provision exculpating directors from monetary damages in certain cases applies to claims relating to disclosure issues in general and protects directors from monetary liability for good-faith omissions. *Arnold v. Society for Sav. Bancorp, Inc.*, 650 A.2d 1270 (Del. 1994). Similar provisions have been adopted in most states. The limitation on personal liability does not affect the availability of injunctive relief.

<sup>13</sup> *Smith v. Van Gorkom*, 488 A.2d 858, 874 (Del. 1985) (holding that, in the context of a proposed merger, directors must inform themselves of all “information . . . reasonably available to [them] and relevant to their decision” to recommend the merger); see also *Aronson*, 473 A.2d at 812 (“under the business judgment rule director liability is predicated upon concepts of gross negligence”).

show that a board of directors has not met its duty of care, a plaintiff must prove that directorial conduct has risen to the level of “gross negligence.” In addition, Delaware statutory law permits directors in exercising their duty of care to rely on certain materials and information.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, directors charged with approving compensation arrangements should be familiar with the purpose of the arrangements, the nature of the benefits and should reasonably understand the costs; in so doing, directors may reasonably rely on the reports of their committees and advisers.

#### **b. Duty of Loyalty**

The duty of loyalty requires directors to act in the best interests of the corporation. Subsumed within this duty of loyalty is the directors’ duty to act in good faith. In the landmark *Disney* case,<sup>15</sup> shareholders filed suit alleging that the board of directors did not act in good faith in approving the roughly \$140 million employment and termination package of former Disney president Michael Ovitz. While the Delaware Court of Chancery ultimately exonerated the board of directors, the court caused a great deal of controversy in the initial stages of the case when it denied the directors’ motion to dismiss. According to the court’s initial opinion, if the facts alleged in the complaint were proven at trial, the directors would have been found to have breached their fiduciary duty of “good faith” in approving the hiring and termination. While some academics and corporate gadflies applauded the court’s initial decision, the business world wondered whether the court’s decision served as a harbinger of potentially massive personal liability for disinterested directorial business decisions—when analyzed under the lens of 20-20 hindsight—even though the directors derived no personal benefit from those decisions. The court’s ultimate decision exonerating the Disney directors quieted these concerns.

The *Disney* decision helps delineate the scope of protection of directors against personal liability for claimed breach of fiduciary duty. Negligence—that is, a failure to use due care—should not result in personal liability unless the director failed to act in “good faith.” The court ruled that an appropriate measure for determining that a director has acted in good faith is whether there is an “intentional dereliction of duty, a conscious disregard for one’s responsibilities.” The court ruled that a director fails to act in good faith when the director (1) “intentionally acts with a purpose other than that of advancing the best interests of the company,” (2) “acts with intent to violate applicable positive law,” or (3) “intentionally fails to

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<sup>14</sup> 8 Del. Code Ann. § 141(e).

<sup>15</sup> *In re The Walt Disney Co. Derivative Litig.*, 2005 WL 1875804.



act in the face of a known duty to act, demonstrating a conscious disregard for his duties.”<sup>16</sup>

The *Disney* decision also made clear that, although directors are encouraged to employ evolving best practices of corporate governance, directors will not be held liable for failure to comply with “the aspirational ideal of best practices.” In other words, directors will have the benefit of the business judgment rule if they act on an informed basis, in good faith and not in their personal self-interest, and, in so doing, protect themselves from “*post hoc* penalties from a reviewing court using perfect hindsight.” As the Court noted, shareholder redress for failures that arise from faithful management “must come from the markets, through the action of shareholders and the free flow of capital, and not from this Court.”<sup>17</sup>

In the *Disney* case, the Delaware court also rejected a claim that the Ovitz pay package amounted to corporate waste because the contract providing for his severance pay had a rational business purpose—that of attracting Mr. Ovitz to join Disney. The rational business purpose test is a high hurdle for claims based on waste. Nevertheless, the Delaware Court of Chancery refused to dismiss a corporate waste claim against the Citigroup board arising from the payment of \$68 million to the retiring CEO, Charles Prince.<sup>18</sup> In return for the \$68 million payment, Prince agreed to sign non-compete, non-disparagement, and non-solicitation agreements and a release of claims against Citigroup. The Chancellor’s refusal to dismiss the waste claim was based on his desire to review information regarding the value of the various promises made by Prince relative to the payments he received.

In October 2011, the Delaware Court of Chancery reaffirmed the traditional principles of the common law of executive compensation in dismissing a wide-ranging shareholder challenge to compensation practices at Goldman Sachs, which included claims based on waste and the board’s failure to act in good faith, to be adequately informed and to monitor the company.<sup>19</sup> In particular, the Court noted that “[t]he decision as to how much compensation is appropriate to retain and incentivize employees, both individually and in the aggregate, is a core function of a board of directors exercising its business judgment”<sup>20</sup> and “If the shareholders disa-

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<sup>16</sup> *Id.* at \*1-2.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at \*2.

<sup>18</sup> *In re Citigroup Inc. Shareholder Deriv. Litig.*, 964 A.2d 106, 138 (Del. Ch. 2009).

<sup>19</sup> *In re The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc. Shareholder Litigation*, C.A. No. 5215-VCG (Del. Ch. Oct. 12, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 38.

gree with the board’s judgment, their remedy is to replace board members through directorial elections.”<sup>21</sup>

## 2. Adopting or Amending Compensation Arrangements in the Context of Corporate Transactions

Adopting or amending compensation arrangements in the context of takeover activity or certain negotiated transactions can result in heightened judicial scrutiny. If the adoption or amendment of a compensation arrangement is deemed a defensive measure taken in response to an actual or threatened takeover, the adoption will be subject to judicial review under an “enhanced scrutiny” standard,<sup>22</sup> which looks both to the board of directors’ process and its action. That said, a compensation arrangement will not be subjected to enhanced scrutiny merely because a board of directors adopts a compensation arrangement in the face of a takeover threat; in order for enhanced scrutiny to apply, a board of directors must have entered into the compensation arrangement as a defensive measure.<sup>23</sup> If the arrangement was adopted as a defensive measure, the directors carry the burden of proving that their process and conduct satisfy a two-pronged test (known as the *Unocal* standard):<sup>24</sup>

- a board of directors must show that it had “reasonable grounds for believing that a danger to corporate policy and effectiveness existed,” which may be shown by the directors’ good faith and reasonable investigation; and
- a board of directors must show that the defensive measure chosen was “reasonable in relation to the threat posed,” which may be demonstrated by the objective reasonableness of the course chosen.<sup>25</sup>

If directors can establish both prongs of the *Unocal* test, their actions will receive the protections of the business judgment rule. While the *Unocal* standard still provides a board of directors reasonable latitude in adopting

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<sup>21</sup> *Id.* at 39.

<sup>22</sup> *See, e.g., Unocal Corp. v. Mesa Petroleum Co.*, 493 A.2d 946 (Del. 1985); *Gilbert v. El Paso Co.*, 575 A.2d 1131 (Del. 1990) (analyzing the “golden parachute” employment arrangement among target’s defensive measures subject to enhanced scrutiny).

<sup>23</sup> *See, e.g., Moore v. Wallace Computer Servs.*, 907 F. Supp. 1545 (11th Cir. 1994) (“In addition . . . the facts that such agreements are commonplace among chief executives of major companies and that Cronin’s severance package was identical to that of his predecessor persuade this Court that the adoption of the golden parachute agreement was not a defensive measure.”).

<sup>24</sup> *Unocal*, 493 A.2d at 946.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at 955.

defensive measures,<sup>26</sup> executive compensation plans adopted in response to a takeover threat may result in a court more closely examining a board of directors' process and actions.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, adopting or amending change-in-control employment arrangements in advance of an actual or threatened takeover may be advisable whenever possible.<sup>28</sup>

When an actual conflict of interest that affects a majority of the directors approving a transaction is found, Delaware courts apply the most exacting standard, "entire fairness" review, which requires a judicial determination of whether a transaction is entirely fair to shareholders.<sup>29</sup> Such conflicts may arise in situations where directors (1) appear on both sides of a transaction, as in adoption of compensation arrangements for the directors themselves, or (2) derive a personal financial benefit that does not generally benefit the company and its shareholders.<sup>30</sup> In determining whether a transaction is entirely fair, "the court must consider the process itself that the board followed, the quality of the result it achieved and the quality of the disclosures made to the shareholders to allow them to exercise such choice as the circumstances could provide."<sup>31</sup>

In the context of director and executive compensation, entire fairness scrutiny is most likely to apply where directors have approved a compensation plan specifically for themselves. Even if the compensation arrangements

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<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., *Unitrin, Inc. v. American Gen. Corp.*, 651 A.2d 1362 (Del. 1995).

<sup>27</sup> See *Gilbert*, 575 A.2d at 1141 (applying *Unocal* standard in reviewing defensive measures, including golden parachutes and ESOPs, where "everything that [defendant directors] did was in reaction to [the] tender offer"); *Int'l Ins. Co. v. Johns*, 874 F.2d 1447 (11th Cir. 1989) (stating that the intent of the company's board in enacting a golden parachute is determinative of the standard used; when enacted in response to a takeover threat, the *Unocal* enhanced scrutiny standard applies).

<sup>28</sup> See *Buckhorn, Inc. v. Ropak Corp.*, 656 F. Supp. 209 (S.D. Ohio), *aff'd*, 815 F.2d 76 (6th Cir. 1987) (applying *Unocal* scrutiny to ESOPs and golden parachutes enacted in response to a tender offer, but applying the business judgment rule to protect amendments to those employment contracts enacted before the tender offer); *Moore Corp. Ltd. v. Wallace Computer Servs., Inc.*, 907 F. Supp. 1545 (D. Del. 1995) (refusing to apply *Unocal* scrutiny to golden parachutes negotiated before a tender offer, but applying *Unocal* enhanced scrutiny to the failure to redeem a poison pill); and *In re Western Nat'l Corp. S'holder's Litig.*, 2000 WL 710192 (Del. Ch. May 22, 2000) (applying business judgment rule to board-approved employment agreement granting large severance payment and accelerated vesting of options because applicable employment agreement was adopted before potential acquiror was a shareholder and agreement was negotiated and recommended by disinterested directors).

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., *Weinberger v. UOP, Inc.*, 457 A.2d 701 (Del. 1983).

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., *Ivanhoe Partners*, 535 A.2d at 1334.

<sup>31</sup> *Cinerama, Inc. v. Technicolor*, 663 A.2d 1134, 1140 (Del. Ch. 1995).

directly benefit insider directors, their approval should be protected by the business judgment rule if approved by an independent committee or by the disinterested directors.<sup>32</sup> However, when directors who directly benefit from a proposed plan are delegated the responsibility of approving such a plan, a court will refuse the protection of the business judgment rule and scrutinize the overall fairness of the plan as it relates to the company's shareholders.<sup>33</sup> In light of this treatment, it is generally advisable that the responsibility for adopting director compensation be delegated to a company's corporate governance and nominating committee, subject to the approval of the entire board of directors.

## **B. Fiduciary Duties Under ERISA**

ERISA is the federal law governing employee retirement and welfare benefit plans. Although its original enactment was spurred by a Congressional concern for adequate funding of traditional defined benefit pension plans, ERISA has imposed from its inception a comprehensive set of requirements for many types of broad-based benefit plans, including savings plans, such as the well-known "401(k)" plan, ESOPs, and medical and other insurance-type plans. A key component of ERISA is the imposition of fiduciary duties and liabilities on individuals and entities that are named as fiduciaries in plan documents or who actually exercise responsibilities that ERISA considers to be fiduciary in nature. ERISA fiduciary duties are said to be the highest of such duties known to the law. It is critical, therefore, for compensation committee members to understand how fiduciary responsibilities for company plans are allocated and the extent to which they themselves may be liable as ERISA fiduciaries.

A person may become a fiduciary under ERISA by being specifically named as such in a plan document, by being identified as such under a procedure set forth in the plan or by exercising fiduciary responsibilities. A person that appoints a fiduciary is a fiduciary with respect to the appointment. Further, a named fiduciary may delegate fiduciary responsibilities to another person, who thereby becomes a fiduciary. Compensation committees may, therefore, be considered ERISA fiduciaries for many reasons, including as a result of language in their charters or in plan doc-

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<sup>32</sup> See *Tate & Lyle PLC v. Staley Continental, Inc.*, 1988 Del. Ch. LEXIS 61, \*20 (Del. Ch. May 9, 1988) (permitting outside directors to approve compensation for insider directors after conducting reasonable inquiry and obtaining full board of directors approval); *Puma v. Marriott*, 283 A.2d 693 (Del. Ch. 1971) (applying the business judgment rule instead of *Unocal* to review a company transaction with a controlling shareholder where the transaction was approved by independent directors).

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., *Tate & Lyle PLC*, *supra*, at \*20-22 (invalidating rabbi trust covering both inside and outside directors because of conflict of interest).

uments, as a result of exercising administrative responsibilities for ERISA plans, by virtue of involvement in managing the assets funding ERISA plans, or because they appoint plan fiduciaries (which may include employees of the company as well as third-party institutions such as trust companies or investment managers).

The decision to adopt a particular compensatory arrangement, even if the arrangement is itself subject to ERISA (such as a 401(k) plan) is generally not considered a “settlor function” and is not subject to ERISA’s fiduciary duty rules. However, once an ERISA plan is adopted, fiduciary duties may attach to determinations made pursuant to that plan. ERISA requires that fiduciaries exercise their fiduciary duties prudently and solely in the best interests of plan participants. While it is not impermissible for an individual or entity that acts as a plan fiduciary also to have another role that affects the plan, fiduciaries must be alert to the possibility of conflicts of interest, which can pose particularly difficult issues. Consider, for example, the common situation in which an individual who has responsibility for selecting the investment choices to be offered to 401(k) plan participants—including company stock—learns, in his or her capacity as a member of a board of directors, of confidential information that may, when announced, cause a significant and long-term drop in the company’s stock price: the individual’s fiduciary duty under ERISA to offer only prudent investment choices to plan participants could come into conflict with the individual’s duty under the federal securities laws not to use confidential information before it is made public and with the business strategy being pursued on behalf of shareholders generally. This type of fact pattern has generated many lawsuits against directors and executives, most of which have resulted in decisions favoring the fiduciaries.<sup>34</sup> Major corporate transactions also can present situations in which ERISA and corporate responsibilities may come into conflict, particularly for plans that invest in company stock.

Many companies choose to have company employees and/or independent third parties, rather than members of the board of directors, serve as ERISA fiduciaries. In such cases, however, the responsibility to appoint those fiduciaries often remains with the full board of directors or the compensation committee. As noted above, those who appoint fiduciaries are themselves fiduciaries, and, while they do not have the same breadth of ERISA fiduciary responsibility, must still exercise their appointment powers prudently and solely in the best interests of plan participants. This responsibility includes exercising some oversight over the performance of the appointees.

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<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., *In re: Citigroup ERISA Litigation*, 662 F.3d 128 (2d Cir. 2011).



### III

#### Methods of Compensation

##### A. Understanding and Pursuing Compensation Goals and Objectives

“Pay-for-performance” has been the past decade’s mantra for “best practices” in executive compensation. While compensation programs should be designed so that compensation increases as corporate or individual performance metrics are met or exceeded, the financial crisis has highlighted the challenges and risks of measuring performance on a short-term basis and produced an increased emphasis on the forms of compensation that preserve and enhance the long-term value of the company.

The highest priority for a company in designing a compensation program should be to create economic incentives and encourage particular behavior. Companies should balance the need to retain employees and incentivize them, by compensating employees in a manner that rewards growth and appropriate risk taking with the need to preserve the business. With respect to performance-based compensation, companies should select performance criteria that reflect true measures of operating performance and long-term value creation and a compensation committee may consider preserving some negative discretion to adjust downward award amounts in the event of anomalous results.

Careful thought should go into the structure and design of compensation programs to help ensure that they protect against the creation of short-term windfalls for employees that do not match long-term sustained benefits for shareholders. Moreover, a compensation committee should seek programs that it believes are in the best interests of shareholders generally, not programs that are merely intended to appease individual shareholder critics and the media at any given moment. These groups may have short-term interests that do not take into account the future well-being of the company and may have interests that are inconsistent with the interests of shareholders generally.

The different types of compensation described below are not mutually exclusive alternatives. Companies can and should consider granting a mix of types of compensation based on their business needs. A compensation committee should determine, in its business judgment based on the particular needs of the business, the appropriate mix of fixed compensation (*e.g.*, annual base salary) and variable compensation (*i.e.*, short- and long-term performance incentives), as well as the form of compensation (*e.g.*, stock options, restricted shares, restricted stock units or cash-based payments). No particular compensation vehicle (*e.g.*, stock options) should be off the table simply because it has been criticized in the media or by

shareholder activists, although committees should understand how awards will be considered by proxy advisory firms in connection with the “say-on-pay vote” recommendation.

## **B. Equity Compensation**

The manner in which most companies provide executives with equity compensation continues to evolve. We have set forth below the material characteristics of various types of equity compensation awards to aid committee members in understanding the issues involved in the design of equity compensation alternatives. To facilitate decision-making with respect to the granting of equity compensation awards, compensation committees should familiarize themselves with the economic, tax and accounting implications of granting different forms of equity compensation.

### **1. Stock Options**

Stock options provide employees with the opportunity to buy shares of company stock at a fixed price during a specified period of time, allowing the employee to benefit from appreciation in the value of company stock. Stock options typically have an exercise price equal to the fair market value of the underlying stock on the date of grant. Vesting of stock options generally is contingent upon an employee’s continued employment for a specified period of time (service-based options) and/or upon the achievement of specified performance goals, which may be an additional condition to vesting (performance-based options) or may result in vesting at an earlier point in time (performance-accelerated stock options).

The benefits and drawbacks to granting stock options are as follows:

| <i>Benefits</i>   | <i>Drawbacks</i>   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Generally deductible under Section 162(m) of the Code<sup>35</sup> without the need to establish additional performance goals if strike price is equal to or greater than fair market value on grant date.</li><li>• Generally not subject to Section 409A of the Code if strike price is equal to or greater than fair</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An accounting charge must be recognized following the grant even though no economic benefit may be derived by the optionee (although it is possible that the value ultimately achieved by the optionee will exceed the charge recognized).</li><li>• Because stock option holders receive a benefit if the stock</li></ul> |

<sup>35</sup> Section 162(m) of the Code, as well as the other Code provisions and the stock exchange rules referenced in the charts in this Chapter III, are outlined and discussed more fully in Chapter IV of this Guide.



### *Benefits*

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market value on grant date, it is based on “service recipient” stock and there is not otherwise any deferral feature.

- Because stock options are not considered outstanding shares until exercised, they are not counted in the denominator for calculating earnings per share.
- Optionees only realize a benefit from the award if the value of the stock exceeds the exercise price and do not realize any loss if the stock price never exceeds the exercise price.

### *Drawbacks*

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price increases, but have no downside if the price decreases, stock option holders may be incentivized to pursue riskier strategies.

- Potential disconnect between amount of pay received by optionee and amount of expense to company.
- Because optionees typically have a long period during which to exercise their stock options, a well-timed exercise can result in significant gain even where the company’s stock does not provide commensurate long-term gain for shareholders.
- The grant of stock options results in an increase of so-called “overhang,” which ultimately can result in dilution of existing shareholders if the stock options are exercised. We note that institutional shareholders often measure dilution taking into account outstanding stock options and/or even reserved option shares.
- In a falling stock market, underwater stock options may lose retentive value.
- Internal controls surrounding the grant of stock options have increased in complexity.
- ISS does not consider time-based stock options as performance-based compensation for purposes of its “pay for performance” analysis.

## **2. Stock Appreciation Rights**

Stock Appreciation Rights (“SARs”) provide employees the right to receive an amount equal to the appreciation in value of company stock over a certain price during a specified period of time. Upon exercise of a SAR,

the company pays the employee cash, stock or a combination thereof equal in value to the underlying stock's appreciation.

The benefits and drawbacks of granting SARs generally are the same as granting stock options, except:

| <i>Benefits</i>  | <i>Drawbacks</i>   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• SARs that may be settled only in cash are not equity compensation under the NYSE and NASDAQ rules. Accordingly, no shareholder approval under such rules is required with respect to plans under which only these awards may be granted.</li><li>• Like stock options, SARs generally are not subject to Section 409A of the Code if the strike price is equal to or greater than fair market value on the grant date and a SAR is based on service recipient stock.</li><li>• The exercise of SARs does not require the holder to tender an exercise price for which he or she may need to borrow against the exercise proceeds or engage in a broker-assisted cashless exercise, either of which must be carefully structured to avoid a violation of Section 402 of Sarbanes-Oxley.</li><li>• SARs settled in cash instead of stock do not give rise to Form 4 reporting of subsequent sales.</li><li>• SARs settled in cash instead of stock will not result in equity dilution.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• SARs settled in cash instead of stock will not increase the employee's holdings of company stock.</li><li>• SARs settled in cash are treated as liability awards for accounting purposes (requiring quarterly adjustments to the compensation charge based on the price of the stock underlying the SARs).</li><li>• SARs settled in cash will require an outlay of cash by the company.</li><li>• ISS does not consider time-based SARs as performance-based compensation for purposes of its "pay for performance" analysis.</li></ul> |

### **3. Restricted Stock**

Restricted stock is a grant of shares of company stock subject to specified vesting provisions and limitations on transfer. Vesting of restricted stock typically is contingent upon an employee's continued employment for a specified period of time (service-based restricted stock) and/or upon the achievement of specified performance goals, which may be an additional condition to vesting (performance-based restricted stock) or may result in

vesting at an earlier point in time (performance-accelerated restricted stock).

The benefits and drawbacks of using restricted stock are as follows:

| <i><b>Benefits</b></i>  | <i><b>Drawbacks</b></i>   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Holders of restricted stock share in the upside and the downside of an increase or decrease of share price, which directly aligns the interests of restricted shareholders and shareholders.</li><li>• From the perspective of employees, restricted stock may represent a more tangible benefit than stock options.</li><li>• Holders of restricted stock can vote and receive dividends.</li><li>• The ability of employees to make a Section 83(b) election may enable an employee to achieve a favorable tax result if the value of the restricted stock appreciates during the vesting period (although such elections are uncommon at public companies).</li><li>• Restricted stock generally is not subject to Section 409A of the Code.</li><li>• Holders of restricted stock will realize value even if the price of company stock decreases during or after the vesting period. Accordingly, restricted stock may have greater retentive value than stock options in a down market, and may not encourage risky strategies as could be the case with stock options or SARs.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Employees will receive some value from restricted stock even if the stock performs poorly.</li><li>• Certain institutional shareholders have requested that companies limit the number of “full value” awards such as restricted stock that companies grant to their employees and directors.</li><li>• Shares of restricted stock are outstanding and are included in the denominator for computing “diluted” earnings per share.</li><li>• Restricted stock does not qualify for the “performance-based compensation” exception to the deduction limit imposed by Section 162(m) of the Code unless its grant or vesting is performance-based (within the meaning of Section 162(m) of the Code).</li></ul> |

#### **4. Restricted Stock Units**

Restricted Stock Units (“RSUs”) consist of awards in the form of phantom shares or units, which generally are valued based on company stock. RSUs may be settled in cash, stock or both. As is the case with restricted stock, vesting of RSUs may be service-based, performance-based and/or performance-accelerated. The benefits and limitations of using RSUs as a means of compensation are the same as restricted stock, except:

### *Benefits*

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- Because RSUs are not “property” under Section 83 of the Code and merely represent a general unsecured promise to pay a future amount, an employee may postpone taxation beyond vesting (the company’s deduction is similarly delayed) until such time as the RSUs are settled. Accordingly, RSUs can allow employees to retain an interest in company stock and, consequently, company performance for an extended period of time without triggering a tax liability.
- No administrative burden with respect to stock certificates or electronic share transfers until shares are paid.
- RSUs that can be settled only in cash are not equity compensation under the NYSE and NASDAQ rules. Accordingly, no shareholder approval is required with respect to cash-based RSUs under such rules.
- RSUs settled in cash instead of stock will not result in shareholder dilution.
- Because RSUs are not property (making a Section 83(b) election unavailable), companies do not have the difficulty of administering Section 83(b) elections for broad employee populations.
- RSUs could be structured (if done in advance) to delay delivery of stock to a future date post-termination of employment, which could help align executives’ interests with shareholders and ease enforcement of clawbacks.

### *Drawbacks*

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- If RSUs may be settled only in cash, or in stock or cash at the company’s election, RSUs are not reportable in the proxy statement beneficial ownership table.
- Because RSUs are not property, grantees cannot make a Section 83(b) election.
- RSUs settled in cash instead of stock require a cash outlay by the company, and unless such settlement could jeopardize the company as an ongoing concern (a high standard), Section 409A of the Code does not allow the company to delay payment even if such a cash outlay could significantly impair the company financially (*e.g.*, cause it to be in default under its credit facility).
- RSUs settled in cash instead of stock will not increase the employee’s holdings of company stock.
- RSUs do not qualify for the “performance-based compensation” exception to the deduction limit imposed by Section 162(m) of the Code unless their grant or vesting is performance-based (within the meaning of Section 162(m) of the Code) or the receipt of income from the award is deferred until the executive is no longer subject to Section 162(m) of the Code.
- RSUs settled in cash are treated as liability awards for accounting purposes (requiring quarterly adjustments to the compensation charge based on the price of the stock underlying the RSU).
- RSUs which provide for the deferral of payment post-

vesting may be subject to Section 409A of the Code, depending on their terms, which can limit a company's flexibility to modify such awards (*e.g.*, accelerate settlement, or further delay settlement, of previously vested RSUs).

### **C. Retirement Programs**

In addition to the other compensation programs described above, compensation committees often provide executives with retirement benefits under either defined contribution plans (*e.g.*, 401(k) plans) or defined benefit plans (*e.g.*, pension plans that provide a fixed retirement benefit based on years of service and final pay). These arrangements can either be (1) "qualified plans," which provide the company with tax benefits but generally must be provided to a large portion of the employees and are subject to limitations on, among other things, the aggregate benefit payable to participants under the plans and complex rules under the Code and ERISA or (2) "nonqualified plans," which may be limited to senior executives and provide them with additional retirement benefits that are not subject to the limitations imposed under the Code and ERISA.

When designing nonqualified retirement plans, companies should be sure to understand the cost of the arrangements, including any implications that increases in annual compensation may have on that cost. Moreover, as these programs generally represent a general unsecured promise by the company to pay amounts to executives in the future, which constitute accrued liabilities that show up in a company's financial statements, they effectively result in executives being creditors of the company. As creditors of the company, executives with large non-qualified retirement benefits may be incentivized to act more conservatively with regard to risk taking and capital investment, especially as they approach the stated retirement age when their pensions become payable.

### **D. Perquisites**

No perquisites should be provided to executive officers without full disclosure to the compensation committee. Any compensation or other benefit received by any officer from any affiliated entities (using a low threshold for the definition of an affiliated entity) should be carefully reviewed to confirm compliance with the company's code of business conduct and ethics and applicable law. Perquisite programs and company charitable donations to any organizations with which an executive is affiliated should

be carefully scrutinized to make sure that they do not create any potential appearance of impropriety.

Regulators and institutional shareholders are giving intense scrutiny to executive compensation. While the rhetoric may, in many cases, be overblown, procedure and disclosure are often as important as the substance of underlying compensation packages. And while criticism cannot always be avoided, actions taken by a well-informed and objective compensation committee, which are then appropriately disclosed to shareholders, will be shielded from liability. Some companies have modified perquisite programs by increasing annual base salaries and eliminating perks, by limiting the aggregate value of perquisites to less than the proxy disclosure threshold and/or by entering into arrangements whereby the company is reimbursed by the executives for perks that the company provides.

#### **E. Clawback Provisions**

Clawback policies provide companies with the ability to recoup incentive-based compensation in certain circumstances, such as a financial restatement or commission of an act detrimental to the company. Over the past several years, clawback policies have increased dramatically in prevalence. According to a recent study, the prevalence of Fortune 100 companies with publicly disclosed clawback policies increased from 17.6% to 90%.<sup>36</sup> That number will soon increase to 100% due to the mandatory clawback policy included in Dodd-Frank that is described below.

Clawback policies provide a number of benefits to a company, including enhancing shareholder confidence in executive accountability, promoting the accuracy of financial statements and alignment of risks and rewards. In addition, many institutional investors favor clawback policies and the adoption of such a policy can result in favorable press and public perception. Of course, there are also countervailing considerations. If inappropriately designed, clawback policies can result in unfair treatment of executives and put pressure on compensation committee members to enforce the policies, even where directors do not believe that it is appropriate to do so.

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<sup>36</sup> See PWC, *Executive Compensation: Clawbacks*, 2014 Proxy Disclosure Study (2015).

If a company chooses to adopt a clawback policy, it should address several key design issues and ensure that there is an understanding of any implications under the accounting rules relating to stock-based compensation. The most fundamental questions are:

- What acts will give rise to the right to clawback compensation (*i.e.*, financial restatements or broad range of acts)?
- Will the acts require misconduct on behalf of the executive?
- Who will be covered by the clawback policy (*i.e.*, executive officers or larger workforce)?
- During what period of time will the right to clawback exist (*i.e.*, will it be perpetual or sunset)?
- Will “due process” protections apply (*e.g.*, an executive’s right to be heard before the board of directors prior to enforcement, supermajority vote of the board of directors required to enforce and/or reimbursement of the executive’s legal fees if he or she prevails in a dispute over the clawback)?
- Will amounts clawed back be repaid on a pre-tax or after-tax basis?
- Will the clawback be in the form of a policy adopted by the board of directors or the compensation committee (in which case enforcement typically would be through a lawsuit against the executive claiming unjust enrichment), or one or more agreements between the company and the executive giving the company contractual clawback rights?
- Is there a reasonable expectation that the clawback policy is enforceable under applicable state laws, to the extent the clawback policy is broader than that currently described under Dodd-Frank?

There is no “right” answer to each of the foregoing questions and each company should tailor its clawback policy to address company-specific needs. However, it is important to give due consideration to each feature of a policy to optimize its effectiveness for the company.

Some of these decisions will likely soon be preempted due to Dodd-Frank. Dodd-Frank requires that the SEC promulgate rules requiring listed companies to adopt a policy that mandates clawbacks of compensation that was paid to a current or former executive officer during the three-year period preceding the date on which the company is required to prepare an accounting restatement as a result of material noncompliance with the securities laws, if the compensation is determined to have been based on erroneous data. The SEC is further required to direct the securities ex-

changes to prohibit the listing of companies that do not comply with those rules. As of the date of publication of this Guide, the SEC has not issued those rules, and many questions regarding the Dodd-Frank clawback mandate remain unanswered. What is clear, however, is that the Dodd-Frank clawback will be much broader than the only currently existing statutory clawback, which is the one provided under Section 304 of Sarbanes-Oxley. Most significantly, the Dodd-Frank clawback (1) will require each listed company to adopt a written policy, whereas the Sarbanes-Oxley clawback operates on its own as a matter of law, (2) does not require there to have been any misconduct for compensation to be subject to clawback, as does Sarbanes-Oxley, and (3) covers all current and former executive officers of a listed company, whereas Sarbanes-Oxley only covers the chief executive officer and chief financial officer.

Until the SEC issues rules implementing the Dodd-Frank clawback, companies may wish to wait before adopting a new clawback policy or amending an existing one, although the proxy advisory firms do focus on whether a company has a clawback policy, including in connection with ISS's evaluation of an equity plan proposal under its new "Equity Plan Scorecard" method.



## IV

### Laws and Rules Affecting Compensation

#### A. Section 162(m) of the Internal Revenue Code

##### 1. General

Section 162(m) of the Code generally disallows a publicly traded company's federal income tax deduction for compensation paid to "covered employees" in excess of \$1 million during a company's taxable year. The \$1 million deduction limit covers all types of compensation, including cash, property and spread on the exercise of options. However, there are important exceptions to the deduction limitation, including performance-based compensation keyed to a pre-established, objective, nondiscretionary goal and formula, which are described in detail below.

In light of Section 162(m), a publicly traded company generally is left with two choices: (a) forgo a federal income tax deduction for compensation during a taxable year in excess of \$1 million to any one of its "covered employees," or (b) adopt compensation practices so that any compensation in excess of \$1 million either (1) consists of performance-based compensation structured to comply with the requirements of the performance-based compensation exception or (2) is deferred to a time when the recipient is no longer one of the company's "covered employees." For financial institutions receiving government assistance under the Troubled Asset Relief Program ("TARP") and for certain health insurance providers, the deduction limitation has been lowered from \$1 million to \$500,000 and there is no exception for performance-based compensation.

##### 2. "Covered Employees" Subject to the Limitation

"Covered employees" for purposes of Section 162(m) are a company's principal executive officer and the three other most highly compensated executive officers who are required to be named in the company's executive compensation disclosure under the SEC disclosure rules (other than the CFO). As such, the term "covered employee" does not currently include a CFO, regardless of whether the CFO is among the other three highest compensated officers for the taxable year.

While the exclusion of the CFO from Section 162(m) may be beneficial to companies whose CFOs receive compensation in excess of \$1 million that does not otherwise comply with the performance-based exception of Section 162(m), the limitations of Section 162(m) generally apply to a company in the taxable year in which the compensation would otherwise be deductible, and Congress may ultimately amend the statute to provide that CFOs are covered employees. Indeed, the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 ("EESA") amended Section 162(m) for financial insti-

tutions participating in TARP to be more stringent and to apply to CFOs. Accordingly, even though there are only four executive officers potentially covered by Section 162(m), companies should cast a broad net when determining the executive officers who potentially could be considered “covered employees” when designing their compensation programs.

### **3. Performance-Based Compensation Exception**

The \$1 million deduction limit does not apply to compensation that meets the following requirements:

- the compensation is payable solely on account of attaining one or more pre-established, nondiscretionary and objective performance goals (options and SARs granted with a strike price at or above fair market value meet this requirement);
- the performance goal(s) is established no later than 90 days after the beginning of the service period to which the goal relates and within the first 25% of the performance period to which they relate, and achievement thereof is determined, by a compensation committee, or a subcommittee thereof, of the board of directors comprised solely of two or more “outside” directors;
- the material terms of the performance goal(s) under which the compensation is to be paid are disclosed to shareholders and approved by a majority of the shareholders voting in a separate vote before any compensation due in respect of such performance goal is payable; and
- before the compensation is paid, the compensation committee certifies that the performance goals and any other material terms were satisfied.

### **4. Section 162(m) Compliance Procedures**

Compensation committees should have their incentive compensation plans and arrangements and the manner in which they are administered reviewed by counsel to determine whether they are in fact complying with the requirements of the performance-based exception from Section 162(m), where such compliance is intended. Compensation committee members should familiarize themselves with the basics of Section 162(m) and take them into account in structuring executive compensation. Moreover, a compensation committee should confirm that the proxy statement disclosure relating to Section 162(m) is accurate and that the proper internal controls to ensure compliance in this area have been implemented. In particular, a compensation committee should consider designating an individual at the company as the compliance person for Section 162(m) and

should request periodic compliance updates so that the Section 162(m) requirements are fully understood.

## **B. Section 409A of the Internal Revenue Code**

Section 409A of the Code imposes penalties on participants in deferred compensation arrangements that do not comply with the strict requirements of the rules. “Deferred compensation” for these purposes can, perhaps unexpectedly, include severance payments and reimbursement rights. Given the far-reaching impact of Section 409A, companies have rightly devoted, and continue to devote, a great deal of time and resources to implementing and operating programs to comply with Section 409A. While a compensation committee should satisfy itself that the company is aware of and is complying with the legislation, the committee need not spend inordinate amounts of time trying to understand the intricacies of the technical rules that have no impact on the arrangements’ commercial terms.

## **C. Stock Exchange Rules Regarding Shareholder Approval of Equity Compensation Plans**

### **1. General Rules**

NYSE and NASDAQ listing standards require listed companies to obtain shareholder approval of most equity compensation plans. A compensation committee should be aware that these rules may require shareholder approval of proposed plans and material plan amendments. NYSE and NASDAQ rules *exclude* the following types of plans from this shareholder approval requirement:

- arrangements under which employees receive cash payments based on the value of shares rather than actual shares (*e.g.*, cash-settled phantom stock);
- arrangements that are made available to shareholders generally (such as a typical dividend reinvestment plan);
- arrangements that merely provide a convenient way for employees, directors or other service providers to purchase stock at fair market value;
- plans intended to qualify under Section 401(a) of the Code (qualified pension, profit-sharing and stock bonus plans) or Section 423 of the Code (employee stock purchase plans);
- “parallel excess plans,” a narrowly defined category of excess benefit plans;
- equity grants made as a material inducement to an individual becoming an employee of the issuer or any of its subsidiaries;

- rollover of options and other equity awards in connection with a merger or acquisition; and
- post-acquisition grants to those who are not employees of the acquirer at the time of acquisition of shares remaining under a target plan that had been approved by the target's shareholders (although use of such share reserves in connection with the transaction will be counted by the NYSE and NASDAQ in determining whether the transaction must receive shareholder approval as an issuance of 20% or more of the company's outstanding common stock).

## **2. Material Revisions**

The NYSE and NASDAQ rules provide the following examples of revisions to equity compensation plans that are considered "material" and, therefore, require shareholder approval:

- a material increase in the number of shares available under the plan, other than an increase solely to reflect a reorganization, stock split, merger, spin-off or similar transaction;
- an expansion of the types of awards available under the plan;
- a material expansion of the class of individuals eligible to participate in the plan;
- a material expansion of the term of the plan;
- a material change to the method of determining the strike price of options under the plan; and
- a deletion or limitation of any provision prohibiting repricing of options.

In light of the requirement that material amendments be approved by shareholders, a compensation committee should consider requesting that newly adopted plans be drafted to ensure maximum flexibility in the types of awards that can be granted and the terms and conditions thereof.

## V

### **Change-in-Control Compensation Arrangements**

#### **A. Addressing Executive Uncertainty**

Executives of a company that is the subject of a merger or other acquisition proposal often become the focus of a great deal of pressure, including the pressure caused by uncertainty as to their own future if a combination takes place. Executive recruiters often take advantage of the uncertainties created by these situations to attempt to induce executives of a target company to consider alternative employment. To offset these pressures and to recruit and retain executives, we recommend (and most public companies have adopted) executive compensation programs containing change-in-control provisions for senior management.

Change-in-control severance and other arrangements are not intended to deter combinations, but, by reducing the personal uncertainty and anxiety arising from a merger, such arrangements can help to assure full and impartial consideration of takeover proposals by a company's management and aid a company in attracting and retaining key executives. Careful attention must be paid, however, to the applicable statutes and regulations to make sure that all tax and other legal concerns are properly reflected in any arrangement that is adopted.

Issues surrounding compensation, such as the treatment of equity awards, severance protection and retention, continue to be of critical importance in transactions. Changes in compensation arrangements stemming from the influence of proxy advisors, including the trends of eliminating "golden parachute" excise tax gross-ups and single-trigger vesting, and the increasing prevalence of equity awards that are performance-based and deferred, requires companies to understand and consider in careful detail the consequences and tax implications of a change in control.

#### **B. Arrangements**

##### **1. Change-in-Control Protections**

Many companies have adopted change-in-control protections for senior management. Typically, these protections include change-in-control severance or employment agreements or, increasingly, severance protection plans. A change-in-control employment or severance protection agreement or plan often becomes effective only upon a change in control or in the event of a termination of employment in anticipation of a change in control. A standard form of agreement or plan usually provides for a two- or three-year term after the change in control during which time the status quo is preserved for the executive in terms of duties, responsibilities and

employee benefits. In general, the event that the status quo is not preserved and the executive resigns or the executive's employment is terminated by the company, the executive would be entitled to severance pay (typically, a multiple of base salary plus an annual bonus amount).

Most change-in-control employment or severance protection agreements and plans also contain provisions addressing the so-called "golden parachute" excise tax. The federal golden parachute tax rules subject "excess parachute payments" to a dual penalty: the imposition of a 20% excise tax upon the recipient and nondeductibility of such payments by the paying company. Excess parachute payments result if the aggregate payments received by a "disqualified individual" that are "contingent on a change in control" equal or exceed three times the individual's "base amount" (the average annual taxable compensation of the individual for the five years preceding the year in which the change in control occurs). In such a case, the excess parachute payments are equal to the excess of (1) such aggregate change-in-control payments over (2) the employee's base amount. In other words, the excise tax and nondeductibility rules apply not just to the excess over three times the base amount, but, once triggered, apply to the whole amount in excess of the base amount.

Three approaches to dealing with golden parachute tax penalties in change-in-control agreements and plans generally are taken:

- payments can be "grossed up" so that the employee is in the same after-tax position as if there were no excise tax;
- payments that are contingent on a change in control can be "cut back" to 299.9% of the base amount, so that no payments are considered parachute payments; and
- payments that are contingent on a change in control are cut back only if the result is to give the employee a larger after-tax return than if the payment were not cut back (a so-called "better-off cutback").

After an analysis of the amounts involved, many companies historically adopted a "gross-up" provision in order to ensure that the excise tax does not undo the intended goals of the arrangement. In addition, gross-ups often were provided for reasons of equity because the excise tax punishes promoted employees in favor of those who are not promoted, newly hired employees in favor of longer-term employees, employees who do not exercise options in favor of those who do and employees who elect to defer compensation in favor of those who do not. Moreover, the tax is more likely to apply to employees who receive change-in-control acceleration of performance-based compensation than it is to apply to those who receive acceleration of time-based awards.

ISS has identified the adoption of golden parachute excise tax gross-ups in new, extended or materially modified agreements or executive change-in-control plans as a “problematic” pay practice that is likely to result in a negative recommendation on a say-on-pay vote or, where there is no say-on-pay vote or where concerns expressed by ISS on a say-on-pay vote are not addressed in the following year, a “withhold the vote” recommendation for the compensation committee or even the entire board of directors. Companies that have implemented golden parachute excise tax gross-ups in preexisting agreements and plans and have determined that such gross-ups are in the best interests of the company and its shareholders need not eliminate them to avoid scrutiny by ISS, as ISS generally will make its recommendations regarding the periodic “say-on-pay” vote (but not the “golden parachute say-on-pay” vote) taking into account only agreements and plans that are new, extended or materially amended. Those companies that wish to preserve such gross-ups should only amend the arrangements that contain the gross-ups with great care, as such amendments could de-grandfather the arrangements and result in ISS review for these purposes.<sup>37</sup> While an extension of an existing agreement will trigger ISS review, the automatic renewal of an agreement with an “evergreen” provision (itself a feature that ISS does not consider a “best practice”) generally will not be deemed an “extension” for that purpose.<sup>38</sup>

In light of ISS’s position on golden parachute excise tax gross-ups, many companies have elected to provide better-off cutbacks as such provisions provide the executives with as much of the intended benefit, as he would receive if no excise tax applied without providing a gross-up. And, while the acquiring company will lose the deduction if an executive is better off receiving all payments and paying the tax, we have not been involved in any transactions where the costs associated with the lost deduction were a significant deal issue.

## **2. Stock-Based Compensation Plans**

In addition to employment and severance protection agreements and plans, companies should review the status of their stock-based compensation plans for change-in-control provisions. Plans often contain provisions for acceleration of stock options, lapse of restrictions on restricted stock and deemed achievement of performance goals on performance stock awards upon a change in control or upon a severance-qualifying termination

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<sup>37</sup> See Chapter VI of this Guide for a more detailed discussion of say-on-pay votes and ISS and other proxy advisory firms generally.

<sup>38</sup> See Chapter VI of this Guide for a more detailed discussion of say-on-pay votes and ISS and other proxy advisory firms generally.

thereafter. Stock plans also often provide an extended post-termination exercise period for stock options and SARs upon terminations of employment following a change in control (*e.g.*, the lesser of three years or the remainder of the original term). Since these provisions may result in parachute payments, plan amendments should be considered and implemented in the context of an overall review of change-in-control employment protections, and the associated costs should be analyzed in that context. While ISS encourages double-trigger change in control vesting, single-trigger vesting provisions in an equity plan will not automatically result in a negative recommendation for the equity plan, although equity plans that include both single trigger vesting and a liberal change-in-control definition “are likely to receive a negative recommendation.” Note also that on March 3, 2015, ISS issued updated “Frequently Asked Questions” that include an FAQ clarifying that an equity plan will be considered to provide for single trigger vesting of performance-vesting awards unless (1) at the time of a change in control, the performance is measured as of such date, and (2) the award is prorated through such date.

In designing employee stock plans, as well as other types of benefit and compensation plans, companies should be sensitive to the need to retain key personnel through the closing of a transaction to help ensure that the board of directors is delivering to the acquirer an intact management team.

### **3. Separation Plans**

In addition to change-in-control employment and severance protection agreements with, and/or plans covering, senior executives, many public companies have adopted change-in-control separation plans, or so-called “tin parachutes,” for less senior executives, sometimes covering the entire workforce. These separation plans either formalize informal policies or provide enhanced severance in the event of a layoff occurring within one or two years after a change in control. These plans generally provide for severance benefits determined on the basis of seniority/position, pay and years of service or some combination of these factors, and may provide continuation of benefits with the company paying all or a portion of the expense and outplacement services. Severance usually is payable following an involuntary termination without cause or a constructive termination, such as relocation, decrease in base salary or wages, or material diminution in duties.

Due to the large numbers of people involved, separation plans should be adopted after a careful review of the estimated costs, including an analysis of the potential impact of golden parachute excise tax and deductibility provisions of the Code on the payments and benefits provided under the plan. The last minute addition of enhanced severance costs may drive up the cost of a merger. Further, targets should be sensitive to the fact that in



an in-market merger involving branch closings or similar reductions in force, an acquirer may be forced to adopt the target's severance policies so that employees of the acquirer who are laid off are not treated worse than similarly situated target employees.

#### **4. Deferred Compensation Plans**

Due to the credit risk associated with the payment of deferred compensation and other unfunded nonqualified plan benefits, plans often provide for, or participants elect, an immediate lump-sum payment of the entire account balance upon a change in control without regard to prior elections as to timing and method of distribution. Any such election should be reviewed to ensure that it complies with Section 409A of the Code.



## VI

### Shareholder Proposals, Relations and Litigation

The enactment in 2010 of mandatory say-on-pay shareholder votes, even though such votes are nonbinding, represented the most tangible result of the prior decade's push by shareholder advocacy groups for a more direct shareholder role in executive compensation matters. Because most large companies have opted for an annual say-on-pay vote, 2014 witnessed the fourth year of say-on-pay voting for most companies. As in the three prior years, the overwhelming majority of companies received a favorable say-on-pay vote. However, concern over say-on-pay support levels continues to influence company action, both in terms of compensation design and shareholder outreach strategy. This chapter discusses the evolution of say-on-pay, as well as other notable developments in the area of compensation-related shareholder proposals, the compensation policies of proxy advisory groups (notably ISS) and executive compensation litigation.

#### A. Say-on-Pay

Dodd-Frank mandated three different types of nonbinding shareholder votes on compensation matters.

- No less frequently than once every three calendar years, each public company must submit the compensation of its NEOs to a nonbinding shareholder vote (the say-on-pay vote).
- No less frequently than once every six calendar years, each public company must submit for a nonbinding shareholder vote the question of whether the say-on-pay vote should be held annually, biennially or triennially (the say-when-on-pay vote). All companies were required to hold such a vote at their first shareholder meeting occurring after January 21, 2011.
- In any proxy statement or consent solicitation for a shareholder meeting to approve an acquisition, merger, consolidation or sale of substantially all of a company's assets, a public company must submit all golden parachute arrangements covering any of its NEOs to a separate nonbinding shareholder vote, unless the arrangements have already been "subject to" a say-on-pay vote (the "golden parachute say-on-pay" vote).

#### 1. The Say-on-Pay Vote

The say-on-pay vote must cover the compensation of an issuer's NEOs, as disclosed in accordance with Item 402 of Regulation S-K, including the CD&A; it does not cover director compensation, nor does it cover the portion of the proxy disclosure related to compensation and risk with respect to broad-based programs. The vote is a single line-item on the relevant

compensation arrangements in their entirety. The SEC rules do not require companies to use specific language or a prescribed format in say-on-pay resolutions, although they include a nonexclusive example of a resolution that would satisfy the applicable requirements. The proxy statement must include an explanation of the effect of the vote (*i.e.*, that it is non-binding), and future proxy statements must address whether (and if so, how) the company has considered the results of the most recent vote in determining compensation policies and decisions.

The say-on-pay vote serves as an important barometer of shareholder views of a public company's compensation practices. As discussed below, ISS has indicated that it intends to utilize say-on-pay votes, where offered, as its primary vehicle for expressing dissatisfaction with compensation practices. While the say-on-pay vote is nonbinding, companies are quite focused on receiving a favorable outcome, and poor results have the potential to trigger significant investor pressure and even litigation.<sup>39</sup>

In 2014, over 97% of Russell 3000 companies that submitted a say-on-pay vote received majority support, with average support levels at approximately 91%. These support levels are quite close to the corresponding results from 2013. ISS recommended a vote against approximately 13% (a percentage roughly consistent with 2012 and 2013) of the proposals, so a favorable vote was achieved even in a significant majority of the cases where ISS had made a negative recommendation. However, an ISS negative recommendation correlated significantly with lower support levels. Average support at companies with a favorable ISS recommendation was 94%, while average support at companies with a negative recommendation from ISS was 66%.

While overall results have thus far been fairly positive, companies should approach each proxy season with a fresh perspective, as changes in company performance, company compensation programs, and investor guidelines can have significant impact. As discussed below, ISS engages in extra scrutiny of company responses to say-on-pay for those that did not achieve 70% support in the prior year's say-on-pay vote.

Each company's situation is unique, but, as a general rule, a company can take certain steps that will best position the company for the say-on-pay vote.

- *Analyze Prior Year's Results and Shareholder Policies.* Companies should periodically review the voting policies of major

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<sup>39</sup> See Section D of this Chapter VI of this Guide.

shareholders and understand the ways in which compensation practices may deviate from those policies. As part of that review, companies should revisit the prior year's vote results and proxy advisory firm recommendations in order to understand issues that may be particularly sensitive for the advisory firms. While companies should not make substantive compensation decisions that they do not believe are in the best interests of shareholders merely in the hopes of increasing support for their say-on-pay proposals, changes may be appropriate where a company feels, upon reflection, that its compensation arrangements could be improved based on feedback from its shareholders.

- *Communicate With Shareholders Through the CD&A.* The CD&A represents a critical communication tool in the effort to win say-on-pay votes. Companies should use an executive summary to highlight key points and key developments since the prior year, shareholder-favored practices that the company maintains and hot button practices that the company does not maintain. Given the large number of proxy statements which the typical institutional shareholder must review each proxy season, ease of readability is critical. Liberal use of graphs, tables and bullet-pointed lists is preferable to paragraphs of prose.
- *Directly Engage With Shareholders.* Companies that received low support in the prior year or have reason to be concerned about low support at their next annual meeting (*e.g.*, its three-year TSR is low) should consider commencing a direct dialogue with institutional shareholders before ISS issues its report. This is a process which requires careful consideration, and involves:
  - identifying significant shareholders which should be approached and, if available, their voting policies;
  - determining the person at each identified shareholder who should be contacted, with the goal being to gain the ear of a decision maker and recognizing the delineation at most large institutions between the investment management team and the proxy voting team;
  - deciding who should make the approach to the identified shareholders, understanding that some shareholders prefer to meet with Compensation Committee members (particularly, the Chair), while others prefer meeting with in-house subject matter experts in the executive compensation, human resources or legal functions (but not the CEO, as the discussion is often about his or her own compensation) and outside advisors;

- figuring out the ideal time to approach the identified shareholders, with the understanding that telephone calls and meetings which occur outside of proxy season are most likely to gain focused shareholder attention and also provide an opportunity for a second approach to the shareholders after the issuance of the ISS report if it is problematic; and
- crafting a section of the CD&A to describe the shareholder engagement process, including any changes in compensation programs based on shareholder feedback.

See our client [memorandum](#) dated December 12, 2013 for an additional discussion regarding the importance of shareholder engagement.

- *Respond to ISS's Recommendation.* As noted above and discussed below, ISS wields significant influence in the say-on-pay process. After the proxy has been filed, ISS will issue its report regarding the say-on-pay proposal. While smaller companies will not be given an opportunity to comment on ISS's report before it is finalized, S&P 500 companies will be given a draft report no more than a few days before it is finalized and will have a chance to comment on it. To be in a position to respond promptly to the report, S&P 500 companies should anticipate the timing of the report's release and assemble a task force in advance that will be available to respond on short notice. Comments to the report should focus on those areas that ISS has shown willingness to change: factual errors and inflammatory but irrelevant rhetoric. Regardless of whether ISS is responsive to comments, companies should, as noted above, take their cases directly to shareholders, through in-person meetings, by filing supplemental proxy materials or both.

## 2. The Say-When-on-Pay Vote

Dodd-Frank requires a nonbinding vote, at least once every six calendar years, to determine the frequency of say-on-pay votes. SEC rules require that shareholders receive the option to vote for one of four choices (annual, biennial, triennial or abstain). Thus, a company cannot offer a "yes" or "no" vote on its preferred option, although the company may make a vote recommendation.<sup>40</sup> In 2011, when most companies were required to conduct a frequency vote, the annual option received the most support at ap-

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<sup>40</sup> Note that, under SEC rules, companies may vote uninstructed proxy cards in accordance with management's recommendation for the frequency vote only if the company (1) includes a recommendation for the frequency vote in the proxy statement, (2) permits abstention on the proxy card, and (3) includes language regarding how uninstructed shares will be voted in bold on the proxy card.

proximately 80% of companies, the triennial option at approximately 19% and the biennial option at approximately 1%. In response, over 70% of Russell 3000 companies elected to conduct votes annually.

Although from a policy perspective a triennial vote offers several advantages, the market appears to have spoken in support of an annual vote, at least for larger companies, and an annual vote is generally the prudent approach for large companies with a diverse shareholder base. From a policy standpoint, a triennial approach permits shareholders, directors and managers to evaluate the effects of a company's pay program on long-term performance and is less likely to subject a company's compensation plans to the whims of constituencies seeking to apply pressures unrelated to long-term corporate performance. In addition, the triennial approach allows shareholders to engage in more thoughtful analysis and voting by providing more time between votes and provides management with the time necessary to implement improvements and changes to address concerns reflected by a negative vote. For such reasons, companies that are controlled or that are for other reasons less sensitive to potential investor criticism of a less frequent vote choice may wish to elect a triennial approach.

At the same time, an annual vote offers many practical benefits. Providing shareholders with an annual say-on-pay vote gives shareholders an avenue other than director elections to express their dissatisfaction with pay practices at the company and, therefore, may save directors the embarrassment of receiving a significant number of "no" votes. In addition, holding an annual say-on-pay vote may ultimately help the company avoid antagonizing shareholders that favor an annual vote.

Ultimately, each company should weigh the policy benefits of a triennial vote against the practical advantages of an annual vote. The determination will, of course, depend in part on whether a triennial vote will result in negative consequences for a company. ISS has announced that it will recommend an "against" or "withhold" vote on the entire board if a company implements a say-on-pay vote on a less frequent basis than the frequency that received the majority of votes cast at the most recent shareholder meeting. Before making a final determination on the frequency vote, a company should take into account its particular circumstances, including: (1) year-over-year consistency of pay structures and amounts, (2) relationships with shareholders, and (3) the nature of its shareholder base and its positions on the frequency vote and say-on-pay generally. For most companies, the likelihood of adverse shareholder reaction to a less frequent than annual vote will outweigh the policy benefits of a less frequent vote, although companies that have successfully implemented a less frequent vote without adverse shareholder reaction need not make a change simply to conform to the general trend.

A company must disclose on Form 8-K its decision regarding the frequency of the say-on-pay vote in light of the results of the say-when-on-pay vote. The Form 8-K must be filed no later than 150 calendar days after the date of the applicable meeting, and in any event no later than 60 calendar days prior to the deadline for submission of shareholder proposals for the subsequent annual meeting. Companies must include in their proxy materials disclosure of the current frequency of say-on-pay votes and when the next scheduled say-on-pay vote will occur.

### **3. The Golden Parachute Say-on-Pay Vote**

Under Dodd-Frank, the golden parachute say-on-pay vote applies to any proxy statement or consent solicitation for a shareholder meeting to approve an acquisition, merger, consolidation or sale of substantially all of a company's assets.

SEC rules require disclosure in a prescribed tabular format of all golden parachute compensation arrangements in connection with the transaction. For this purpose, SEC rules define "golden parachute" fairly broadly to encompass all agreements and understandings between the target or the acquirer and each NEO of the target or the acquirer that relate to the transaction. However, the shareholder advisory vote with respect to golden parachute arrangements applies solely with respect to those arrangements between a soliciting party (typically the target) and its NEOs. If a company previously has submitted golden parachute arrangements to a say-on-pay vote and has not modified those arrangements, the company will not be required to submit those arrangements to the golden parachute say-on-pay vote so long as the company's disclosure for the prior say-on-pay vote satisfied the tabular disclosure and other requirements applicable to golden parachute say-on-pay votes.<sup>41</sup>

In 2014, 131 companies disclosed results of golden parachute votes for non-asset transactions. All but four received more votes in favor than against, with average support in excess of 80% of votes cast. Significantly, the vote results from the first several years of golden parachute say-on-pay votes do not appear to indicate any correlation between levels of support on the golden parachute say-on-pay vote and on the underlying transaction. Out of 389 companies that reported voting results for meetings held between 2011 and July 2014, 200 of the companies received less than

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<sup>41</sup> Note that the rules applicable to annual proxy disclosure of termination and change-in-control arrangements, unlike the golden parachute say-on-pay rules, do not prescribe a mandatory tabular disclosure format.



90% support for their say-on-golden parachute proposals, but only 27 of the companies received less than 90% support for the transaction.

## **B. Shareholder Proposals**

The advent of say-on-pay has reduced, but not eliminated, compensation-based shareholder proposals from individual shareholder activists and academic gadflies. Many institutional shareholders subscribe to the services of shareholder advisory firms who provide blanket voting policies on such issues, and, in many cases, rely heavily on those firms' proxy voting guidelines, regardless of an individual company's performance or governance fundamentals. As a result, many shareholder votes are foreordained by a voting policy that is applied to all companies without regard to the particulars of a given company's situation. Shareholder advisory firms are discussed in detail in the following section of this Guide.

In the 2015 proxy season, activists will continue to push their agendas through shareholder proposals as part of their efforts to maintain focus on corporate governance matters. The appropriate course of action with respect to any particular proposal will depend upon the facts and circumstances. In some cases, it may be possible to exclude a proposal under applicable SEC rules. In other cases, a company might resolve a proposal by engaging in dialogue with the shareholder proponent. In still other instances, it may make sense to implement a particular proposal. In formulating responses to shareholder proposals, companies should recognize that activists and shareholder advisory firms carefully monitor company action in this area and may shine a spotlight on those companies that they view as uncooperative. Ultimately, however, executive compensation is a core responsibility of the board, and directors must bear in mind that they are best positioned to establish optimal company-specific compensation programs.

## **C. Shareholder Advisory Firms**

Over the past several years, the influence of shareholder advisory firms in compensation matters has expanded as a result of their widely followed public shareholder voting recommendations on compensation matters put to shareholders. Moreover, a company's compensation practices can influence how these firms recommend that shareholders vote in director elections. The most influential of these firms is ISS. The compensation committee should periodically review updates regarding ISS's positions on pay practices, as a means of understanding the potential shareholder reaction to, and the best means of explaining, compensation decisions.

We describe in Section VI.A. above some of ISS's positions on the say-when-on-pay and golden parachute say-on-pay advisory votes. The say-on-pay vote will be the primary vehicle through which ISS will express its

view on a company's pay practices. ISS will not object to pay practices through "withhold" recommendations on compensation committee or director reelection votes, unless the company's so-called "problematic pay practices" are in its view "egregious" or concerns raised by ISS in connection with a say-on-pay vote are not, in its view, sufficiently addressed in the subsequent year.

In developing its recommendations, ISS generally has taken an "integrated, holistic" approach in reviewing a company's executive compensation program, which includes an overall evaluation of pay-for-performance and pay practices, rather than evaluating each pay program and pay practice separately. ISS will determine what, if any, problematic pay practices a company maintains, as well as grade it on pay-for-performance, and, through that analysis, develop a positive or negative recommendation on a company's say-on-pay vote. For this reason, companies should remain aware of, and current on, the list of problematic pay practices. That list is long, and includes:

- employment contracts containing multiyear guarantees for salary increases, nonperformance-based bonuses and equity compensation;
- an "overly generous" new-hire package for a CEO (*i.e.*, excessive "make whole" provisions without sufficient rationale or with any other "problematic pay practices" listed in ISS's policy);
- "abnormally large" bonus payouts without justifiable performance linkage or proper disclosure (*i.e.*, includes performance metrics that are changed, canceled or replaced during the performance period without adequate explanation of the action and the link to performance);
- "egregious" pension or supplemental executive retirement plan payouts (*e.g.*, inclusion of additional years of service not worked that result in significant benefits provided in new arrangements, inclusion of performance-based equity awards in the pension calculation);
- "excessive" perquisites (*i.e.*, perquisites for former and/or retired executives, such as lifetime benefits, car allowances, personal use of corporate aircraft or other "inappropriate" arrangements or extraordinary relocation benefits (including home buyouts));
- "excessive" severance and/or change-in-control provisions (*i.e.*, change-in-control payments exceeding three times base salary and bonus or without loss of job or substantial diminution of job duties, new or materially modified agreements that include the right to resign for any reason and collect severance

or an excise tax gross-up, excessive payments upon an executive's termination in connection with performance failure);

- tax reimbursements;
- dividends or dividend equivalents paid on unvested performance shares or units, or executives using company stock in hedging activities;
- repricing or replacing underwater stock options or stock appreciation rights without prior shareholder approval;
- executives using company stock in hedging activities, such as “cashless collars”; and
- an “excessive differential” between CEO total pay and that of the next-highest paid NEO.

Note that engagement in a small number of these practices may not, in itself, result in an adverse recommendation from ISS. However, there is a list of other pay practices that ISS deems sufficiently problematic individually to warrant a recommendation to vote against a company's say-on-pay proposal or, in specified circumstances, a director “withhold” vote recommendation. The list of these “egregious” practices includes:

- repricing underwater options without prior shareholder approval;
- “excessive” perks or tax gross-ups; and
- new or extended agreements that provide for change-in-control payments that are single trigger, exceed three times salary and bonus, or include an excise tax gross-up. An agreement which automatically renews due to an “evergreen” provision will not be considered a “new or extended agreement” for this purpose.

ISS will not consider a company's commitment to eliminate a problematic pay practice in the future as a way of preventing or reversing a negative vote recommendation. By way of example, many companies received a positive ISS recommendation prior to 2011 even in the face of adopting a new agreement with a golden parachute excise tax gross-up, if combined with a publicly announced commitment that future agreements would not contain a gross-up. Such a strategy no longer works, even as to commitments made before the policy change was announced.

ISS generally will issue an adverse say-on-pay vote recommendation if there is what it terms a “misalignment” between pay and performance. Moreover, in the case of such a misalignment, ISS also may recommend voting against an equity plan proposal if a significant portion of CEO pay is attributable to nonperformance-vesting equity awards. Given the im-

portance of the pay-for-performance test and the focus by ISS on companies whose say-on-pay support falls below 70% (discussed below), compensation committees will be well-served by understanding the test, and may wish to consider having a “dry run” of it performed prior to proxy season in order to understand whether the vote might be at risk.

ISS has provided significant detail about how it will run the pay-for-performance test (see January 2013 white paper and March 3, 2015 “Frequently Asked Questions”). First, ISS performs a quantitative analysis of pay versus performance. If the results of that analysis indicate significant misalignment between pay and performance, ISS then performs a qualitative assessment of the subject company’s pay practices, to determine either the likely cause of the misalignment, or identify mitigating factors.

The ISS quantitative analysis attempts to measure (1) the relative degree of alignment between CEO pay and total shareholder return (TSR) within the subject company’s peer group for a three-year period, (2) the prior year’s CEO pay as a multiple of the median pay of its peer group for the same period (a second “relative” test), and (3) the absolute alignment between CEO pay and the company’s TSR over a five-year period. ISS will focus initially on an 8-digit GICS resolution to identify peers that are closely aligned with the subject company in terms of industry, resulting in an expected 80% of the ISS peer group being in the same 8-digit GICS group as the subject company or its self-selected peers, and none in the ISS peer group being based solely on a 2-digit GICS code. After the application of this GICS code process, ISS will populate the peer group with 14 to 24 companies, prioritizing peers that maintain the subject company near the median of the peer group, based on revenues, assets and market capitalization. “Super-mega” nonfinancial companies (approximately 25 Russell 3000 companies, each with greater than \$50 billion in annual revenues and at least \$30 billion in market capitalization) will collectively comprise a stand-alone peer group, and ISS will compare their respective TSR performance and CEO pay against the members of that group. In each case, annual revenues, assets and market capitalizations will be determined as of June 1 or December 1 (presumably the relevant year is the year prior to the year in which the proxy is definitively filed).

If the results of the quantitative analysis indicate, in ISS’s view, a significant misalignment between pay and performance, then ISS will perform a quantitative evaluation of the company’s pay program, focusing on items such as (1) the ratio of performance- to time-based equity compensation, (2) overall ratio of performance-based compensation, (3) completeness of disclosure and rigor of performance goals, (4) peer group benchmarking practices, (5) actual results of financial/operational metrics, (6) one-time or periodic events such as the recruitment of a new CEO or multiyear award grants, and (7) “realizable” pay versus grant date pay for S&P 500

companies, with realizable pay based on amounts paid or earned, or gains realized (or the current value of ongoing incentive grants made), during a specified measurement period, generally of three fiscal years.

ISS will evaluate, on a case-by-case basis, its recommendation regarding say-on-pay proposals and compensation committee member elections where a company's say-on-pay proposal in the previous year received the support of less than 70% of the votes cast. ISS's evaluation will be based on the company's response to the concerns expressed by shareholders in the previous year, including disclosed engagement efforts with major institutional investors and specific actions taken to address the issues which led to the lack of support of 30% or more. ISS has stated that cases where support was less than 50% will "warrant the highest degree of responsiveness." Given the low threshold of opposition votes triggering the more stringent review, companies may treat a say-on-pay vote with majority, but less than 70%, support as effectively a lost vote.

ISS has created a new "Equity Plan Scorecard" as an alternative to its prior series of stand-alone tests focused on costs and certain problematic pay practices. Under this approach, recommendations on equity plan proposals will be based on a combination of weighted factors related to plan costs, plan features and company grant practices, with relative weights varying by index group. A score of 53 or higher (out of 100 points) generally results in a positive recommendation (ISS Consulting recommends achieving "at least" a score of 58). The new approach will weigh factors relating to three key categories (weighting the various factors for S&P 500 and Russell 3000 companies as described below):

- *Plan Cost (45% weighting)*: the total potential cost of the company's equity plans, measured by the company's estimated Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT), relative to its industry/market cap peers, with SVT calculated for both (1) new shares requested, plus shares remaining for future grants, plus outstanding unvested/unexercised grants, and (2) new shares requested, plus shares remaining for future grants.
- *Plan Features (20% weighting)*: the following features that may have a negative impact on the Scorecard results (1) automatic, single-trigger award vesting upon a change in control; (2) discretionary vesting authority; (3) liberal share recycling on various award types; and (4) minimum vesting period for grants made under the plan.
- *Grant Practices (35% weighting)*: (1) three-year burn rate relative to peers; (2) vesting requirements in most recent CEO equity grants; (3) the estimated duration of the plan; (4) the proportion of

the CEO's most recent equity grants/awards subject to performance conditions; and (5) whether the company maintains clawback and shareholding requirements.

ISS will continue to recommend a vote against an equity plan if it includes certain egregious features, such as option repricing without shareholder approval or a liberal change-in-control definition.

Glass Lewis' new guidance disfavors out-of-plan equity grants, supports clawbacks and emphasizes the importance of shareholder engagement for companies that receive less than 75% support for their say-on-pay proposals.

We recommend that compensation committees remain cognizant of the advisory firms' current policies and take them into account in structuring pay programs. However, because of the "one-size-fits-all" nature of their evaluation processes, in the final analysis, a compensation committee should make decisions that comport with its company's individual circumstances and needs.

With respect to golden parachute say-on-pay votes, ISS's current policy is to make recommendations on a case-by-case basis on proposals to approve golden parachute compensation, consistent with policies on problematic pay practices related to severance. Beginning in 2013, ISS's golden parachute say-on-pay analysis included an evaluation of existing arrangements, as well as new ones.

#### **D. Executive Compensation Litigation**

One of the biggest executive compensation-related developments of recent years is the marked increase in litigation over executive compensation arrangements and related disclosure. As described below, these suits have been brought in federal and state courts, have sought monetary and injunctive relief and have covered many of the "hot button" topics in today's compensation environment. Familiarity with the increasing litigation is helpful; however, directors should take comfort that a committee that follows normal procedures and considers the advice of legal counsel and an independent consultant should not fear being second-guessed by the courts, which continue to respect compensation decisions so long as the directors act on an informed basis, in good faith and not in their personal self-interest.

##### **1. Section 162(m) Related Suits**

A number of derivative suits have been filed in recent years, alleging that the senior executive compensation plans at public companies do not com-

ply with Section 162(m) of the Internal Revenue Code. As described more fully in Chapter IV.A. of this Guide, Section 162(m) provides that any compensation paid to the CEO and the next three highest compensated proxy officers (other than the CFO) in excess of \$1 million per year is not tax deductible unless, among other things, the compensation is subject to objective performance metrics that have been disclosed to and approved by shareholders. These derivative complaints have generally alleged that the performance goals established by the plans are not sufficiently objective to comply with Section 162(m) and that the purported failure of the plans to comply with Section 162(m) renders the required proxy disclosure false and misleading, in violation of Section 14(a) of the Securities Exchange Act. In addition, the complaints have alleged that the provision of nondeductible compensation to senior executives constitutes corporate waste, unjust enrichment of the executives and a breach of the directors' duty of loyalty.

We view these suits as meritless and symptomatic of the excesses that led to reform in other areas of shareholder litigation. In almost all of these cases, the terms of the plans have, in fact, complied with Section 162(m), and the disclosure relating to the plans has expressly stated that nondeductible compensation may be granted if the compensation committee determines that doing so is in the best interest of the company. Moreover, many of these complaints, in alleging that performance goals are not sufficiently objective to comply with Section 162(m), have reflected a basic lack of understanding of the operation of typical public company incentive plans, whereby a compensation committee establishes an objective Section 162(m) goal which, if met, would then provide the committee with the discretion to make an award below the amount authorized by the plan. This "plan-within-a-plan" structure is expressly permitted by the Code. In addition, there is no legal obligation for compensation committees to grant only compensation that is deductible under Section 162(m). The courts have largely gotten this right by ruling against the plaintiffs on motions to dismiss (*see, e.g.*, Justice Stark's well-reasoned opinion in *Seinfeld v. O'Connor*, 2011 WL 1193212 (D. Del. 2011)).

These lawsuits nonetheless serve as a reminder that careful attention must be paid to the design and administration of plans intended to comply with Section 162(m) and that the disclosure relating to tax deductibility must be carefully drafted. Companies should design plans to make compliance with Section 162(m) as easy and straightforward as possible. Equally important, proxy disclosure should not guarantee that all compensation awarded will comply with Section 162(m). Instead, proxy disclosure should say that plans are "intended to" comply with Section 162(m), that compensation intended to comply may fail to do so if the requirements of Section 162(m) are not met and that the company may elect to provide nondeductible compensation.

## 2. Say-on-Pay Suits — Round One

Following the 2011 proxy season, the first season of mandatory say-on-pay, shareholders brought a host of lawsuits against companies that failed their “say-on-pay” votes. These suits were largely unsuccessful, either failing outright or resulting in nominal settlements.

Characteristic of this first round of law suits was a decision by the United States District Court for the District of Oregon in which the court ruled that an action against directors of Umpqua Holdings Corporation arising out of a negative “say-on-pay” vote should be dismissed. The court determined that plaintiffs failed to raise a reasonable doubt that the challenged compensation was a reasonable exercise of the board’s business judgment. *Plumbers Local No. 137 Pension Fund ex rel. Umpqua Holdings Corp. v. Davis*, 2012 WL 602391 (D. Or., Feb. 23, 2012), *adopting* decision in *Plumbers Local No. 137 Pension Fund v. Davis*, 2012 WL 104776 (Jan. 11, 2012).

At issue in *Davis* was a decision by the compensation committee of Umpqua to pay increased compensation to certain executive officers for 2010—a year in which the bank’s performance had improved and met predetermined compensation targets, but total shareholder return was allegedly negative. In the subsequent advisory “say-on-pay” vote, a majority of the shares voted disapproved of the 2010 compensation. Plaintiffs claimed that it was unreasonable for the Umpqua board of directors to increase compensation and that the shareholder vote rejecting the compensation package was *prima facie* evidence that the board’s action was not in the corporation’s or shareholders’ best interest.

The court rejected both of plaintiffs’ arguments. Applying Delaware and Oregon law, the court determined that plaintiffs’ “essential position . . . that if a simple comparison reveals a level of compensation inconsistent with general corporate performance, the business judgment presumption is necessarily overcome, [is] a position that is unsupported by the applicable standards.” The court also held that the Dodd-Frank Act did not alter directors’ fiduciary duties and that a negative “say-on-pay” vote alone does not suffice to rebut the business judgment protection for directors’ compensation decisions. In so holding, the court expressly declined to follow a prior federal court decision which had denied a motion to dismiss in a “say-on-pay” action in the Southern District of Ohio, *NECA-IBEW Pension Fund v. Cox*, 2011 WL 4383368 (S.D. Ohio, Sept. 20, 2011).

*Davis* and other cases like it are powerful reminders that directors of companies may base compensation on long-term goals and choose the yardsticks by which to measure executive performance with confidence that courts will respect their good faith business judgment.



### 3. Say-on-Pay and Other Disclosure Suits — Round Two

More recently, several public companies were sued by plaintiffs alleging inadequacy of executive compensation disclosure. In some cases, the allegations regarding say-on-pay disclosure accompanied other allegations regarding disclosures in connection with amendments to equity compensation plans requiring shareholder approval. Following earlier and largely unsuccessful fiduciary duty challenges like *Davis*, these suits were disclosure actions that sought to leverage the threat of enjoining the shareholder vote from taking place.

For the most part, plaintiffs in these cases alleged that the directors breached their duty of disclosure to shareholders under Delaware (or other state) law - as distinct from violations of the compensation disclosure requirements imposed by the federal proxy rules and Regulation S-K<sup>42</sup> - and sought to enjoin a company's annual meeting until the company makes additional disclosures. By filing complaints after a company has mailed its proxy statement and before the meeting date, these plaintiffs attempt to leave companies with little time to react, thereby maximizing pressure on companies to agree to a settlement that involves additional disclosure and an award of attorneys' fees.

In 2012, plaintiffs were able to obtain injunctions against equity plan votes in two cases. However, we are unaware of any injunctions since 2012, although other cases have settled based on additional proxy statement disclosures and the payment of plaintiffs' legal fees. We believe that the claims asserted in the equity plan suits are largely without merit and call for disclosures that are not required by the Securities and Exchange Commission. Nevertheless, directors should be aware of the nature and existence of these claims and the risk of injunctive relief and/or a settlement that involves additional disclosures and payment of legal fees.

Given the amorphous nature of the claims, it is questionable whether prophylactically including additional disclosure of the nature requested in the complaints filed to date will discourage plaintiffs from filing suit. No matter what disclosures a company provides, plaintiffs can invent new

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<sup>42</sup> In connection with an activist shareholder's challenge to Apple's 2013 proxy, another purported shareholder plaintiff alleged that Apple's CD&A disclosures were insufficient under SEC's say-on-pay rules in Item 402(b) of Regulation S-K. The court rejected this challenge, concluding that "because [the plaintiff] failed to identify *any* material omission in the Proxy statement" and because Apple's detailed, 16-page compensation disclosures "appears to be wholly compliant with Item 402(b) of Regulation S-K, the Court finds that [plaintiff] is unlikely to succeed on the merits of his claim . . ." *Greenlight Capital, L.P. v. Apple, Inc.*, 2013 WL 646547 (S.D.N.Y. Feb. 22, 2013).

disclosure deficiencies and argue that omitted matter is “material” under state corporate law. We nevertheless recommend that companies consider including the following disclosures in the section of the proxy statement describing any newly adopted equity plan, if they determine that such disclosure is material:

- all material terms of the plan;
- the methodology used to determine the requested number of shares under the plan that will be made available for future grants to participants;
- the dilutive impact of the additional shares, including historical and expected share usage rates and historical and expected share repurchases. It may be helpful to provide hard data regarding items like burn rate, share overhang, and fair value transfer;
- a summary of the analysis of a compensation consultant of the proposed plan;
- the number of shares available under existing plans as of the latest practicable date prior to the proxy filing;
- the reasons for adopting a new plan as opposed to amending an old plan (*e.g.*, administrative ease, clarification of provisions);
- in addition to the list of permissible performance measures, information regarding performance goals established or expected to be established under the plan or a statement that such goals have not yet been selected, as well as the list of permissible adjustments that may be made to performance measures; and
- a statement along the lines of “while the plan is intended to comply with Section 162(m) of the Code, the Company may elect to provide non-deductible compensation under the plan.”

Plaintiffs have had considerably less success with disclosure claims addressed solely to say-on-pay votes. Part of the *modus operandi* of plaintiffs’ lawyers in these say-on-pay disclosure claims is to evaluate the disclosures of the companies listed as peers in the target company’s proxy, looking for instances in which a peer company has disclosed more executive compensation information than the target company has disclosed, and claiming that any company that discloses less than its identified peers is withholding material facts from its shareholders.

To date, no court has enjoined a nonbinding say-on-pay vote based on the theory that state corporate law required more disclosure than the say-on-pay disclosure requirements imposed by federal law. Numerous courts, both state and federal, have denied motions for injunctions against say-on-

pay votes, and several other such motions have been withdrawn or voluntarily dismissed by plaintiffs. While the failure of say-on-pay and other compensation disclosure claims thus far will hopefully lead to fewer such actions in the future, to minimize the likelihood of such litigation, we recommend that companies study the proxies of their peers to identify what, if any, additional disclosure they make regarding compensation and consider whether such additional disclosure may be appropriate.



## VII

### **Special Considerations Applicable to Financial Institutions**

Executive compensation and broad-based incentive compensation matters at financial institutions continue to be sensitive subjects that are scrutinized by the media and shareholders, and the regulatory requirements and standards relating to the design and administration of compensation arrangements at financial institutions continue to become more complex. While much of the public attention has been focused on executive compensation that is deemed excessive in amount, there has also been a critical assessment of the interplay among compensation and governance policies, corporate risk-taking and short-termism.

Following the financial crisis, regulators have increasingly focused on the structure of compensation deep into the organization as it relates to risk management and the corporate governance practices relating to compensation decisions. Large banking organizations continue to be in dialogue with regulators regarding the implementation of supervisory expectations relating to compensation design, governance and controls. Outside of the United States, newly effective and highly prescriptive E.U. regulations on incentive compensation, such as a cap on bonuses to bankers, is leading to higher fixed compensation (generally through increased salary since in October 2014, European regulators determined that periodic allowances should be treated as incentive compensation) at European financial institutions as they seek to remain competitive in retaining talent.

In the pursuit of good corporate governance and risk management, and as strongly encouraged by regulatory guidance, design changes in compensation programs at financial institutions include longer deferral periods and vesting schedules—changes that result in ongoing and growing deferred compensation expenses, which at some point will need to be paid. It is unclear whether the design changes that are intended to promote safety and soundness will accomplish their intended effect or will prove adequate to retain and incentivize a committed and stable leadership team—critical to any well-run organization.

Set forth below are brief summaries of the final guidance on the safety and soundness of incentive compensation policies, the proposed final rule under Section 956 of Dodd-Frank, the restrictions under Section 111 of EESA and the FDIC's golden parachute limitations. This summary generally identifies where the compensation committee has a specific responsibility or obligation and notes that the complexity of the regulatory framework surrounding the compensation arrangements of financial professionals will likely continue to result in increased responsibilities and challenges for compensation committee members at financial institutions.

## A. Safety and Soundness Guidance

In June 2010, the bank regulatory agencies jointly issued final guidance for financial institutions on incentive compensation. All banking organizations are expected to evaluate incentive compensation and related risk management, control and governance processes, and to address deficiencies or processes inconsistent with safety and soundness. This evaluation is to be done with a view to the three core principles described in the guidance—that incentive compensation should:

- provide employees incentives that appropriately balance risk and reward;
- be compatible with effective controls and risk management; and
- be supported by strong corporate governance, including active and effective board of directors oversight.<sup>43</sup>

The third principle is of primary importance to compensation committee members of banking organizations. The guidelines emphasize governance and board-level oversight and provide that the board of directors of an organization is ultimately responsible for ensuring the organization’s incentive compensation arrangements (“ICAs”) for all covered employees—not just senior executives—are appropriately balanced and do not jeopardize the safety and soundness of the organization. The guidance makes clear that the organization, composition and resources of the boards of directors of banking organizations should permit effective oversight of ICAs. In particular, the guidance requires that a compensation committee take the following actions with respect to a company’s ICAs:

- actively oversee ICAs and directly approve the ICAs for senior executives;
- monitor the performance, and regularly review the design and function, of ICAs; and
- for banking organizations that are significant users of ICAs, review the arrangements on both a backward-looking and forward-looking basis.

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<sup>43</sup> As used in the proposed guidance, the term “board of directors” refers to the members of the board who have primary responsibility for overseeing the incentive compensation system of a banking organization and, for purposes of this discussion, it is assumed that the compensation committee serves this function.

The guidelines expressly call for the involvement of functions, such as compliance, internal audit and risk management in the incentive compensation process. It is, therefore, likely that both management and the compensation committee will need to evolve towards a more consultative and multidisciplinary approach, in particular, during the adjustment period as new compensation best practices evolve from the increased regulatory scrutiny on incentive compensation. The guidance also indicates that the compensation committee should have access to a level of expertise and experience in risk management and compensation practices in the financial services industry that is appropriate to the nature, scope and complexity of the organization's activities.

While the regulators have recognized that the restructuring of ICAs will be an iterative process, institutions are expected to take a thoughtful and incremental approach to addressing any perceived imbalances in the risk profile of their incentive compensation programs. At this stage, compensation committee members of financial institutions should be ensuring that management is implementing the final guidance and considering the guidance when evaluating proposed compensation arrangements.

As the regulation of compensation arrangements at banking organizations increases, the duties of compensation committee members are expanding. It is essential for compensation committee members to understand these duties and take the action necessary to see that the organization has adequate resources to respond to the requests of the various regulators and implement compliant compensation programs. The consequences of failing to meet the standards of the compensation guidelines are not insignificant, as the guidelines provide that supervisory findings on incentive compensation will be included in exam reports and incorporated into supervisory ratings. In addition, supervisory or enforcement action may be taken if incentive compensation or related controls, risk management or governance pose a risk to safety and soundness and acceptable curative measures are not being taken.

## **B. Final Proposed Rule Under Section 956 of Dodd-Frank**

Section 956 of Dodd-Frank prohibits incentive-based compensation arrangements at "covered financial institutions" with assets of \$1 billion or more that provide excessive compensation or could expose the institution to inappropriate risks that could lead to a material financial loss, and requires such covered financial institutions to report their incentive-based compensation arrangements. The final proposed rule under Section 956 of Dodd-Frank would supplement existing rules and guidance of the bank regulatory agencies, imposing additional standards and reporting obligations that overlap, but are not entirely consistent with, existing requirements. The proposed final rule is to become effective six months after its

publication in the Federal Register, which had not occurred as of early April 2015.

### **1. Covered Financial Institutions**

The final proposed rule applies to covered financial institutions that have \$1 billion or more in “total consolidated assets.” The definition of “covered financial institution” includes depository institutions and their holding companies (including the U.S. operations of a foreign bank), broker-dealers registered under Section 15 of the Securities and Exchange Act of 1934, investment advisers under the Investment Advisers Act of 1940 (whether or not registered), credit unions, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and Federal Home Loan Banks. The methodology for determining total consolidated assets under the final proposed rule varies depending upon the category of the institution and the applicable regulator, and for depository institutions and their holding companies is generally determined based on a rolling average.

### **2. Covered Persons**

The final proposed rule applies to “covered persons,” which include executive officers, employees, directors and principal shareholders. While all employees are potentially covered persons, the final proposed rule is intended to apply to the incentive compensation arrangements for covered persons or groups of covered persons that could encourage inappropriate risk-taking to the detriment of the covered financial institution. The “executive officers” of a covered financial institution include any person who holds the title or performs the function of one or more of the following positions: president, chief executive officer, executive chairman, chief operating officer, chief financial officer, chief investment officer, chief lending officer, chief legal officer, chief risk officer or head of a major business line.

### **3. Prohibitions Under the Final Proposed Rule**

Under the final proposed rule, a covered financial institution would be prohibited from establishing or maintaining any incentive-based compensation arrangements for covered persons that encourage inappropriate risks by providing excessive compensation. “Incentive-based compensation arrangement” means any variable compensation that serves as an incentive for performance, including equity-based compensation. Excessive compensation means amounts that are unreasonable or disproportionate to, among other things, the nature, quality and scope of the services performed.

In evaluating whether compensation is excessive, the agencies will consider, among other factors, the following:



- the combined value of all cash and noncash benefits provided to the covered person;
- the compensation history of the covered person and other individuals with comparable expertise at the covered financial institution;
- the financial condition of the covered financial institution;
- comparable compensation practices at comparable institutions; and
- for post-employment benefits, the projected total cost and benefit to the covered financial institution.

Accordingly, while the final proposed rule would apply directly only to incentive-based compensation, regulators will consider all compensation and benefits arrangements in the evaluation of the incentive-based arrangements.

The final proposed rule would prohibit a covered financial institution from establishing or maintaining any incentive-based compensation arrangements that encourage a covered person to expose the institution to a material financial loss. To comply with this standard, an incentive-based compensation arrangement must balance risk and financial rewards (*e.g.*, through payment deferrals, risk adjustment of awards, and/or longer performance periods), be compatible with effective controls and risk management and be supported by strong corporate governance, namely through board of directors oversight of incentive-based compensation arrangements.

#### **4. Additional Requirements Applicable to Larger Covered Financial Institutions**

Larger covered financial institutions (those with total consolidated assets of \$50 billion or more) would be required to defer at least 50% of the incentive-based compensation of their executive officers over a period of at least three years, with a distribution schedule no more rapid than equal annual installments over a three-year deferral period, and payouts adjusted for actual losses or other performance results. In addition, under the final proposed rule, the boards of directors or committees of larger covered financial institutions must identify as additional covered persons any non-executive employees—such as traders with large positions, who have the ability to expose the institution to substantial losses—and must approve the incentive-based compensation arrangements for those individuals.

## **5. Policies and Procedures**

To help ensure compliance with the final proposed rule, covered financial institutions would be required to implement policies and procedures with respect to incentive-based compensation, including the following:

- appointing a monitor who has a separate reporting line to senior management;
- providing the board of directors or committee with data sufficient to allow it to assess the design and performance of incentive arrangements;
- requiring ongoing oversight by the board of directors or committee of incentive compensation arrangements;
- where applicable, implementing deferral arrangements; and
- documenting the adoption, implementation and monitoring of incentive-based compensation arrangements in a manner sufficient for the applicable regulator to determine compliance with Section 956 of Dodd-Frank.

## **6. Required Reports**

The final proposed rule would also require covered financial institutions to provide annually to their designated federal regulator(s) information sufficient for the regulator to assess whether incentive-based compensation arrangements for covered persons provide excessive compensation or could lead to material financial loss. This annual report would include:

- a description of the arrangements applicable to covered persons;
- a description of the institution's policies and procedures applicable to its incentive arrangements;
- for larger institutions, a description of the policies and procedures applicable to covered executives and other covered persons identified as having the ability to expose the institution to substantial risk;
- any material changes to such arrangements and policies and procedures since the last annual report; and
- the specific reasons the institution believes the structure of its arrangements and policies and procedures do not provide covered employees with incentives to behave in a manner that is likely to cause a material financial loss, and do not provide excessive compensation.

### **C. Section 111 of EESA and the Implementation of Interim Final Rules**

In February 2009, the ARRA amended certain provisions of the EESA to impose additional restrictions on institutions receiving TARP assistance, which restrictions were implemented through Interim Final Rules issued by the Treasury in June 2009. The restrictions applicable to TARP recipients address a variety of topics, including severance, incentive compensation and the deductibility of compensation under Section 162(m) of the Code. TARP executive compensation and corporate governance rules also impose additional duties on the compensation committee, primarily relating to monitoring the relationship between compensation arrangements and risk.

The compensation committee of an institution that has received government assistance under TARP should understand, and take care to oversee compliance with, the statutory restrictions, as well as any contractual limitations set forth in the stock purchase agreement entered into with the Treasury pursuant to TARP. For those institutions that have repaid TARP, there are continuing reporting and disclosure obligations with respect to the year in which the TARP obligation is repaid, and care should be taken to ensure that post-TARP compensation clearly relates to the post-TARP period. Prior versions of this Guide include a summary of the compensation limitations applicable to TARP recipients that are not considered to have received “exceptional assistance,” and the duties of the compensation committee.

### **D. FDIC Golden Parachute Regulations**

In addition to the TARP limitations, payments to executives of “troubled” financial institutions may be further limited under the “golden parachute” rules of the FDIC. Subject to certain exceptions, the FDIC rules prohibit troubled insured depository institutions (or their holding companies) from making golden parachute payments to any “institution-affiliated party” (“IAP”), which includes the institution’s directors, officers and employees, among others. The FDIC rules generally define “golden parachute payments” as compensatory payments (or agreements to make compensatory payments) to an IAP by a troubled insured depository institution that are contingent on, or payable after, the termination of the IAP’s primary employment or affiliation with the institution, with exceptions for certain bona fide deferred compensation payments, qualified retirement plan payments, limited payments under nondiscriminatory severance pay arrangements and payments under certain employee welfare benefit plans. As a general matter, there are three exceptions for permissible golden parachute payments by troubled institutions: (a) payments that receive the regulator’s concurrence; (b) payments for a “white knight” (as defined in

the FDIC rules) hired pursuant to an agreement when the entity is troubled or to prevent it from becoming so; and (c) reasonable payments not to exceed 12 months' salary in the event of a change in control of the institution not resulting from an FDIC-assisted transaction or the institution being placed in receivership or conservatorship.

## VIII

### Compensation Committee Membership

In enlisting qualified directors to sit as members on a compensation committee, attention must be paid to the various membership requirements imposed by the company's securities market, Section 162(m) of the Code, Rule 16b-3 under the Exchange Act and state law.

#### A. Independence Standards of the Major Securities Markets<sup>44</sup>

The NYSE and NASDAQ generally require that members of listed company compensation committees be independent.

Both the NYSE and NASDAQ have adopted specific rules as to who can qualify as an independent director, and both markets require that the board of directors of a listed company make an affirmative determination, which must be publicly disclosed, that each director designated as "independent" has no material relationship with the company that would impair his or her independence. Such disqualifying relationships can include commercial, industrial, banking, consulting, legal, accounting, charitable and familial relationships, among others. However, ownership of a significant amount of stock, or affiliation with a major shareholder, should not, in and of itself, preclude a board of directors from determining that an individual is independent. In addition, the listing standards of both the NYSE and the NASDAQ set forth circumstances that, per se, constitute bars to a determination of independence.

As a general matter, a director will be viewed as independent only if the director is a non-management director free of any material family relationship or any material business relationship, other than stock ownership and the directorship, with the company or its management, and has been free of such relationships for three years. The following relationships bar a director from satisfying the independence standards of the NYSE or the NASDAQ, as applicable:

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<sup>44</sup> For additional discussion of the NYSE and the NASDAQ independence requirements, see Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz, *Nominating and Corporate Governance Committee Guide*, Part Three, Ch. XV (2015).

- the director is, or has been within the last three years, an employee<sup>45</sup> of the company;<sup>46</sup>
- an immediate family member of the director is, or has been within the last three years, an executive officer of the company;
- the director is a current partner (or employee, under the NYSE rules) of a firm that is the company's external auditor (or internal auditor, under the NYSE rules);
- an immediate family member of the director is a current partner of a firm that is the company's external auditor (or internal auditor, under the NYSE rules);
- under the NYSE rules, an immediate family member of the director is a current employee of the company's internal or external auditor and personally works on the company's audit;
- the director or an immediate family member was, within the last three years, a partner or employee of a firm that is the company's external auditor (or internal auditor, under the NYSE rules) and personally worked on the company's audit within that time;
- under the NYSE rules, the director or an immediate family member of the director is, or has been within the last three years, an executive officer of another company where any of the company's present executive officers at the same time serves or served on that other company's compensation committee;
- under the NASDAQ rules, the director or an immediate family member of the director is an executive officer of another entity where, at any time during the past three years, any of the executive officers of the issuer served on the compensation committee of such other entity;
- under the NYSE rules, the director is a current employee, or an immediate family member of the director is a current executive officer, of a company that has made payments to, or received payments from, the company for property or services in an amount that, in any of the last three fiscal years, exceeds the

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<sup>45</sup> Both the NYSE and the NASDAQ provide that employment as an interim executive officer does not, in and of itself, disqualify a director from being considered independent following such employment. Under the NASDAQ rules, however, such interim employment cannot last more than one year.

<sup>46</sup> Both the NYSE and the NASDAQ define "company" to include a parent or subsidiary in a consolidated group with the company.

greater of \$1 million or 2% of such other company's consolidated gross revenues;

- under the NASDAQ rules, the director or an immediate family member of the director is a partner, controlling shareholder or an executive officer of any organization to which the company made, or from which the company received, payments for property or services in the current or any of the past three fiscal years that exceed 5% of the recipient's consolidated gross revenues for that year or \$200,000, whichever is more;<sup>47</sup>
- under the NYSE rules, the director or an immediate family member of the director has received during any 12-month period within the last three years more than \$120,000 in direct compensation<sup>48</sup> from the company (other than in director and committee fees and pension or other forms of deferred compensation for prior service (*provided* that such compensation is not contingent in any way on continued service) and compensation received by an immediate family member for service as a non-executive employee);<sup>49</sup> and
- under the NASDAQ rules, the director or an immediate family member of the director received any compensation<sup>50</sup> from the company in excess of \$120,000 during any 12-month period within the last three years (other than director or committee fees, benefits under qualified retirement plans or nondiscre-

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<sup>47</sup> The NASDAQ rules exclude from the calculation payments arising solely from investments in the company's securities and payments under nondiscretionary charitable contribution matching programs.

<sup>48</sup> The NYSE rules focus on direct compensation. Consequently, investment income from the company (such as dividend or interest income) would not count toward the \$120,000 threshold. In addition, the NYSE's focus on "direct" compensation means that bona fide and documented reimbursement of expenses also may be excluded. Note, however, that the NYSE considers payments to a director's solely owned business entity to be direct compensation.

<sup>49</sup> The NYSE rules also permit companies to exclude from the \$120,000 threshold compensation received by a director for former service as an interim executive officer of the company.

<sup>50</sup> Unlike the NYSE rules, the NASDAQ rules are not limited to direct compensation. Accordingly, even indirect compensation must be included in the calculation of the \$120,000 threshold. For instance, the NASDAQ provides that political contributions to the campaign of a director or an immediate family member of the director would be considered indirect compensation, and, as such, must be included for purposes of the \$120,000 threshold.

tionary compensation and payments received by an immediate family member for service as a non-executive employee).<sup>51</sup>

When evaluating the independence of any director who will serve on the compensation committee, NYSE rules require a board of directors to consider all relevant factors that could impair independent judgments about executive compensation, including, but not limited to, (1) the source of compensation of such director, including any consulting, advisory or other compensatory fee paid by the company, and (2) whether the director is affiliated with the company or one of its subsidiaries or affiliates. NASDAQ rules prohibit compensation committee members from accepting any consulting, advisory or other compensatory fees from the company or its subsidiaries (other than directors' fees).

Independence determinations must be based on all relevant facts and circumstances. Thus, even if a director meets all the bright-line criteria set out above, a board of directors is still required to make an affirmative determination that the director has no material relationship with the company. Under NYSE rules, the principles underlying the determination of independence also must be publicly disclosed in the company's annual report or proxy statement. The NYSE rules also provide that the board of directors may adopt and disclose categorical standards to assist it in making determinations of independence and may make a general disclosure if a director meets these standards. The company must disclose any such standard the board of directors adopts. Any determination of independence for a director who does not meet such standards must be specifically explained. In addition, under the SEC disclosure rules, for each director that is identified as independent, the company must describe, by specific category or type, any transactions, relationships or arrangements (other than transactions already disclosed as related-party transactions) that were considered by a board of directors under the company's applicable director independence standards (*e.g.*, the NYSE or the NASDAQ independence rules).

In limited circumstances, NASDAQ permits one director who does not meet its independence rules to serve on the compensation committee without disqualifying the compensation committee from considering the compensation matters that ordinarily would be entrusted to it had it been fully independent. Specifically, if a compensation committee is comprised of at least three members, one non-independent director (who is not a current

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<sup>51</sup> The NASDAQ rules also permit companies to exclude compensation received by a director for service as an interim executive officer; *provided* that such service did not last longer than one year.



officer or employee or a family member of an officer or employee) may be appointed to the compensation committee if the board of directors, under exceptional and limited circumstances, determines that such individual's membership on the compensation committee is required for the best interests of the company and its shareholders. If the board of directors takes this approach, it must disclose in the proxy statement for the next annual meeting subsequent to such determination (or, if the company does not file a proxy, in its annual report on Form 10-K or 20-F) the nature of the relationship and the reasons for the determination. A member appointed under this exception may serve a maximum of two years. The NYSE does not provide a similar exemption.

In addition, newly listed companies on the NYSE or the NASDAQ need only one independent member of the compensation committee at the time of the company's initial public offering, a majority of independent members within 90 days of listing,<sup>52</sup> and a fully independent committee within one year of listing.

#### **B. Internal Revenue Code Section 162(m) Membership Requirements**

As more fully discussed in Chapter IV of this Guide, compensation paid to a company's CEO and the three other highest paid executive officers (other than the CFO) is not deductible to the extent such compensation exceeds \$1 million, unless, among other things, the compensation is approved by a compensation committee consisting entirely of two or more "outside directors."

A director is an outside director if the director (1) is not a current employee of the company, (2) is not a former employee of the company who receives compensation for prior services (other than benefits under a tax-qualified retirement plan) during the taxable year, (3) is not a former officer of the company (whether or not he or she receives compensation for prior services), and (4) does not receive "remuneration" (including any payments in exchange for goods or services) from the company, either directly or indirectly, in any capacity other than as a director. A director is deemed to have received remuneration in either of the following situations:

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<sup>52</sup> If a newly listed NASDAQ company chooses not to have a compensation committee and to have, instead, a majority of the independent directors discharge the duties otherwise associated with a compensation committee, the company may rely on the NASDAQ's phase-in of one year for its separate requirement that there be a majority of independent directors on the board of directors.

- remuneration is paid, directly or indirectly, to the director personally or to an entity in which the director has a beneficial ownership interest of greater than 50%. For this purpose, remuneration is considered paid when actually paid (and throughout the remainder of that taxable year of the company), and, if earlier, throughout the period when a contract or agreement to pay remuneration is outstanding; or
- the company has paid remuneration, other than *de minimis* remuneration, in its preceding taxable year to an entity in which the director has a beneficial ownership interest of at least 5% but not more than 50% or to an entity by which the director is employed or self-employed other than as a director. Remuneration is considered paid when actually paid or, if earlier, when the company becomes liable to pay it.

Payments are *de minimis* if they do not exceed 5% of the gross revenue of the entity receiving the payments for the entity's taxable year. Notwithstanding the foregoing, remuneration is not *de minimis* if it is in excess of \$60,000 or if it is paid for "personal services" to an entity at which the director is employed or self-employed other than as a director. Remuneration is for personal services if:

- the remuneration is paid to an entity for personal or professional services performed for the company, including legal, accounting, investment banking and management consulting services, but is not for services that are incidental to the purchase of goods or to the purchase of services that are not personal services; and
- the director performs significant services (whether or not as an employee) for the company, division or similar organization (within the entity) that actually provides the services to the company, or if more than 50% of the entity's gross revenues (for the entity's preceding taxable year) are derived from that company, subsidiary or similar organization.

Whether a director is an employee or a former officer is determined on the basis of the facts at the time that the individual is serving as a director on the compensation committee. Thus, a director is not precluded from being an outside director solely because the director is a former officer of a company that previously was an affiliate of the company.

### **C. Membership Requirements for the Short-Swing Profit Exemption of Rule 16b-3 Under Section 16(b) of the Exchange Act**

Section 16(b) of the Exchange Act provides that a company insider, such as a director or officer, is liable to the company for any profits resulting from his or her purchase and sale of the company's equity securities within any period of less than six months. The statute and the rules promul-

gated thereunder are quite broad, such that, absent an exemption, the granting of equity compensation to an officer or director of the company may be considered a “non-exempt” purchase for this purpose and subject the officer or director to liability for short-swing profits if the officer or director has a non-exempt sale which can be matched against that purchase. In an effort to address this issue, the SEC adopted Rule 16b-3 of the Exchange Act, which exempts, among other things, grants and awards by the company of its securities to an officer or director if approved by a committee composed solely of two or more “non-employee directors.”

### **1. Non-Employee Director**

Under Rule 16b-3, in order to qualify as a non-employee director, the director cannot (1) be an officer or employee of the company (or of a parent or subsidiary of the company), (2) receive in excess of \$120,000 in compensation, either directly or indirectly, from the company (or from a parent or subsidiary) for services rendered as a consultant or in any capacity other than as a director, or (3) have an interest in any “related party” transaction for which disclosure in the proxy statement would be required pursuant to Item 404(a) of Regulation S-K.

Disclosure under Item 404(a) is required for any “transaction” since the beginning of the company’s last fiscal year or any currently proposed transaction in which the company is a participant, if the amount involved exceeds \$120,000 and any “related person” had or will have a direct or indirect material interest in the transaction. Under the disclosure rules, the term “related person” means any person who was at any time during the relevant period (1) a director or executive officer of the company, (2) any nominee for director (but only if the disclosure is being presented in a proxy or information statement relating to the election of that nominee for director), (3) an immediate family member of a director, executive officer or nominee for director (if the proxy or information statement in which the disclosure is being made relates to the election of that nominee for director) of the company, or (4) a beneficial owner of more than 5% the company’s voting securities or an immediate family member of such owner. “Transaction” for purposes of the rule includes any financial transaction, arrangement or relationship (including any indebtedness or guarantee of indebtedness) or any series of similar transactions, arrangements or relationships. Employment relationships and director compensation otherwise disclosed under Item 402 of Regulation S-K (*i.e.*, the executive compensation disclosure rules) need not be disclosed.

The SEC disclosure rules also make clear that, even if the company disclosed a relevant related-party transaction in the company’s filings for the most recent fiscal year, such transaction will not disqualify the director

under Rule 16b-3 if the transaction was terminated prior to the director's proposed service as a non-employee director.

## **2. Ensuring Compensation Committee Membership Compliance**

It is possible that a compensation committee member will be independent under the NYSE or the NASDAQ rules, but will not be an outside or non-employee director under Section 162(m) of the Code and/or Rule 16b-3 under the Exchange Act. In the event the compensation committee has directors that are independent but are not outside and/or non-employee directors, full compliance with Section 162(m) of the Code and/or Rule 16b-3 is still possible. As long as a compensation committee possesses at least two directors meeting the definitional requirements of outside and/or non-employee directors, the compensation committee can create a subcommittee consisting solely of two or more outside and/or non-employee directors and delegate responsibility with respect to matters falling within the ambit of Section 162(m) of the Code and/or Rule 16b-3 to the subcommittee. Compliance with Section 162(m) of the Code also might be accomplished without the formal creation of a subcommittee if the non-outside directors recuse themselves from the deliberations and decisions falling within Section 162(m) of the Code.

## **3. Ensuring Independence Under State Law**

Transactions between a company and its directors are subjected to intense judicial scrutiny under state law because of the inherent conflict between the corporate insiders' personal financial interests and the insiders' fiduciary duty to a company and its shareholders. In order to avoid such heightened judicial scrutiny of compensation arrangements, compensation arrangements should be approved by, and negotiated with, directors who are disinterested with respect to the compensation decision at issue.

While Delaware courts have, in some instances, appeared receptive to arguments that economically independent directors were disqualified by alleged non-economic conflicts of interest, the determination of independence under state law generally requires only economic independence based on a facts-and-circumstances analysis. In one opinion, the Delaware Supreme Court, addressing the independence of certain directors of Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, Inc.,<sup>53</sup> specifically addressed claims that social connections and personal friendships can result in disqualification from a finding of independence. In deciding

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<sup>53</sup> *Beam v. Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, Inc.*, 845 A.2d 1040 (Del. 2004).

*Martha Stewart*, the Court held that allegations of a mere personal friendship or a mere outside business relationship, standing alone, are insufficient to raise a reasonable doubt about a director's independence. The Court also reiterated its rejection of the concept of "structural bias," the supposition that the professional and social relationships that naturally develop among members of a board of directors impede independent decision-making.

No doubt, each case of alleged directorial conflict of interest is different. Nonetheless, the *Martha Stewart* decision represents an important re-statement of the fundamental principle of corporate governance—the presumption that non-management directors are independent (even if they occasionally play golf with the CEO or attend his or her child's wedding) unless there is real evidence to the contrary.



## **IX**

### **Compensation Committee Meetings**

#### **A. Meetings and Agenda**

A compensation committee must meet with sufficient frequency to perform its duties, and should devote adequate time for planning the timing, agenda and attendees at its meetings. A compensation committee should schedule at least one of its meetings before the company's annual report and proxy statement are filed to discuss the proposed CD&A and other compensation-related disclosures. The number of meetings a compensation committee should hold per year depends upon various factors, including the scope of the compensation committee's responsibilities, the size and business of the company and the nature of the compensation arrangements implemented (or to be implemented) by the company. The SEC requires that companies disclose the number of compensation committee meetings held during the prior fiscal year in their annual proxy statements. Compensation committee meetings, like board of director meetings, should be sufficiently long to allot adequate time to carry out the duties of the compensation committee. Compensation committees should consider scheduling their meetings for the day before full board of director meetings to permit adequate time to consider and discuss agenda items.

A compensation committee should set aside sufficient time, without the presence of the CEO and other executive officers, to deliberate and determine the officers' compensation levels. For NASDAQ companies, the CEO may not be present during discussions of his or her compensation, but a similar requirement is not imposed for other executive officers. A compensation committee should have access to management as it deems appropriate.

A compensation committee should be active in setting its agendas for the year as well as for each compensation committee meeting. While management, rather than the board of directors, sets the strategic and business agenda for the company, including regulatory and compliance goals, directors should determine the bounds of their oversight and responsibilities. The compensation committee meetings and annual agendas should reflect an appropriate division of labor and should be distributed to the compensation committee members in advance.

#### **B. Quorum Requirements**

For a compensation committee to conduct official business at a compensation committee meeting, a quorum of its members must be legally present. Unless otherwise restricted in a company's charter, most states consider a director who participates via telephone or video conference to be legally

present (as long as all those present at the compensation meeting can hear and speak to each other). A company's bylaws or a board of directors resolution should set the minimum number of compensation committee members necessary to establish a quorum. If no minimum number is set by a company, then, absent a state law to the contrary, the default minimum quorum requirement for a compensation committee is a majority of its members.<sup>54</sup> Neither the SEC nor the major securities markets have specific guidelines in this regard, although the SEC does require that the proxy statement disclose the number of compensation committee meetings held during the prior fiscal year, as well as the name of any director who attended fewer than 75% of the aggregate number of meetings of the full board of directors and the committees on which such director served.

Actions undertaken by a compensation committee in the absence of a quorum are voidable. Thus, the minutes should clearly reflect the presence of a quorum in order to protect valid decisions from attack. To help ensure that a quorum is present: (1) compensation committee meeting notices should be sent sufficiently in advance of a compensation committee meeting and responses promptly reviewed, and (2) the chairperson of the compensation committee should consult with the corporate secretary in advance of the compensation committee meeting. In the event a compensation committee meeting takes place without a quorum, it should be noted in the minutes.

### **C. Minutes**

Typically, minutes are prepared of compensation committee meetings, but not of their executive sessions. It is common and prudent practice for such minutes to identify the topics discussed at compensation committee meetings rather than attempt to include detailed summaries. Enough information should be recorded, however, to establish that the compensation committee sought the information it deemed relevant, reviewed the information it received, understood each element of the compensation and otherwise engaged in whatever actions and discussions it deemed appropriate in light of the then-known facts and circumstances. The minutes also should indicate which directors attended, whether they attended in person or via telephone or video conference and whether individuals other than the compensation committee members were present.

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<sup>54</sup> This principle flows from the general default rule that a committee of the board of directors is subject to the same corporate process requirements applicable to the entire board of directors. *See, e.g.*, § 8.25(c) of the Model Business Corporation Act (2002). Since the default quorum of the entire board of directors generally is a majority of its members, the same holds true for a board committee, such as the compensation committee.



A compensation committee should approve the minutes at the compensation committee meeting following the meeting for which the minutes were prepared. The minutes should be attached to the agenda for the next compensation committee meeting and circulated in advance so that the compensation committee members have time to review them before they are approved. If the minutes have not been attached and adequately reviewed before the next compensation committee meeting, it may be advisable for the corporate secretary to read the minutes to the committee members before approval to ensure that they are aware of the actions that were taken at the last compensation committee meeting and approve of their characterization in the minutes. Unless otherwise required by state statute or a company's charter or bylaws, it is neither necessary for the minutes to identify the director presenting a motion or resolution nor to separately identify the directors voting for or against a motion or resolution. However, a dissenting or abstaining director should be identified if he or she so requests.

A compensation committee should consider providing a report or a copy of the minutes of each compensation committee meeting to the full board of directors. Directors who do not serve on the compensation committee should have the opportunity to ask the compensation committee questions relating to the compensation committee's charter or the topics covered at the compensation committee meetings.

#### **D. Shareholder and Director Right of Inspection**

Careful drafting of minutes is especially important because shareholders may inspect the books and records of the company, including committee meeting minutes. In Delaware, for instance, any shareholder may inspect board of director and committee minutes upon making a written demand under oath and stating a "proper purpose" for making the request. While the proper purpose requirement ensures that shareholders do not have carte blanche, activist shareholders increasingly are using this right, and a court's willingness to entertain such a demand cannot be foreclosed.<sup>55</sup> A

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<sup>55</sup> At least one Delaware Court of Chancery decision, *Polygon Global Opportunities Master Fund v. West Corp.*, 2006 WL 2947486 (Del. Ch. Oct. 12, 2006), did announce several important limitations on the use of this tool in the transactional context and possibly beyond. In *West Corp.*, an activist hedge fund (Polygon Global Opportunities Master Fund) demanded access to West Corporation's books and records after West Corporation announced its intention to undertake a going-private transaction. In denying Polygon Global Opportunities Master Fund's demand, the Court held that, in certain circumstances, public information may be sufficient for the shareholder's stated purpose, the books-and-records statute "is not intended to supplant or circumvent discovery proceedings, nor should it be used to obtain that discovery in advance of the appraisal action itself" and

(footnote continued)

2005 Delaware Supreme Court order,<sup>56</sup> remanding a lower court decision allowing a company to demand confidential treatment before divulging sensitive information to dissident shareholders, illustrates the scrutiny companies may face when attempting to prevent public disclosure of even ostensibly confidential information. In its order, the Delaware Supreme Court held that the Court of Chancery must balance a company's interest in confidentiality against a shareholder's communication interest and establish that the confidentiality interest "outweigh[s]" the shareholder's interest.<sup>57</sup>

In litigation, minutes carry added significance given that both Delaware and New York accord corporate minutes a presumption of accuracy. Minutes have been cited in a number of high-profile cases as evidence of directors' alleged lack of care and/or good faith in exercising their fiduciary duties. It is especially important that minutes are carefully and thoughtfully drafted so that an ambiguous litigation record is not created.

#### **E. Access to Outside Advisers**

Under stock exchange listing standards established pursuant to Dodd-Frank, the compensation committee may, in its sole discretion, retain or obtain the advice of a compensation consultant, independent legal counsel or other adviser (after considering factors described in Section A.1 of Chapter I). The rules require compensation committees to be directly responsible for the appointment, compensation and oversight of the advisers they retain and the company to provide for appropriate funding, as determined by the compensation committee, for payment of reasonable compensation to the advisers. Additionally, the charter of a compensation committee must address these rights and responsibilities. As noted above, disclosure requirements mandate detailed disclosure of fees and services in respect of consultants who are not independent.

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(footnote continued)

Polygon Global Opportunities Master Fund's desire to investigate alleged board of director misconduct cannot be a proper purpose because Polygon Global Opportunities Master Fund would not have standing to pursue any claims (given that it purchased shares in West Corp., only after the announcement of the transaction).

<sup>56</sup> *Roy E. Disney v. Walt Disney Co.*, No. 380, 2004 (Del. Mar. 31, 2005) (ORDER).

<sup>57</sup> On remand, however, the Delaware Court of Chancery engaged in the prescribed balancing and concluded that the company's interest in confidential treatment outweighed the shareholder's interest, and, thus, that the provision of the requested information could properly be conditioned on confidentiality. *See Roy E. Disney v. Walt Disney Co.*, 2005 Del. Ch. LEXIS 94 (Del. Ch. June 20, 2005). Thus, it appears that, at least at the Delaware Court of Chancery level, confidential treatment, under appropriate circumstances, still will be available.

Notwithstanding this heavy emphasis on consultant independence, retention of separate advisers for each of the compensation committee and management when considering issues of executive compensation may not always serve the company's best interests. Such an approach can give rise to inefficiencies in compensation discussions, put a board of directors in the awkward position of receiving conflicting advice, create a bad record if litigation subsequently arises and, perhaps most importantly, create an adversarial relationship between management and the board of directors. While directors should have full access to any consultants that are ultimately retained by the company and have the ability and time to ask focused questions of them, the use of consultants is not legally required, and a consultant's judgment should not be viewed as a substitute for a board of directors' exercise of judgment after careful and informed deliberation. As a matter of good corporate governance, a compensation committee should understand the nature and scope of services that consulting firms and their affiliates provide to the company in order to evaluate any actual or perceived conflicts of interests.

#### **F. Compensation Committee Chairperson**

While each member of a compensation committee contributes to its effectiveness, the compensation committee chairperson has a unique role. The compensation committee chairperson is responsible for ensuring that compensation committee meetings run efficiently and that each agenda item receives the appropriate level of attention. The compensation committee chairperson also often serves as the key contact between the compensation committee and other directors and senior management.

Consequently, in choosing the compensation committee chairperson, a board of directors should seek to select a director with leadership skills, including the ability to forge productive working relationships among compensation committee members and with other directors and senior management. No matter who is appointed compensation committee chairperson, as part of the annual review of the compensation committee, the compensation committee and the board of directors should review the combination of talent, knowledge and experience of the compensation committee members to assure that the compensation committee has the right mix of people.

The time commitment resulting from the current regulatory and shareholder activist environment may require additional compensation for directors, and this pressure is especially acute with respect to service on a compensation committee. Although some companies would prefer not to discriminate in compensation among directors, reasonable additional fees for compensation committee members are legal and may be appropriate. Additional compensation for committee chairs is another way to give fair

compensation for those members most burdened with responsibilities. Although, as noted in Chapter XI of this Guide, we generally recommend that the responsibility for director compensation be delegated to the corporate governance and nominating committee, in many public companies the compensation committee reviews the compensation for directors, including the compensation of directors serving on the compensation committee.

## X

### Compensation Committee Charters

Under the SEC's executive compensation disclosure rules, a public company must disclose whether or not it has adopted a compensation committee charter, and any such compensation committee charter must be made publicly available on the company's website or attached to the proxy or information statement at least once every three years. In addition, as described below, the NYSE and NASDAQ require a listed company to adopt a compensation committee charter that must include specified provisions. In light of these requirements, the compensation committee of a publicly held company should have a charter that complies with applicable regulations and securities market requirements rules. That said, any such compensation committee charter should not over-engineer the operation of the compensation committee. If a compensation committee charter requires review or other action and the board of directors or compensation committee has not taken that action, the failure may be considered evidence of lack of due care. The creation of compensation committee charters is an art that requires experience and careful thought; it is a mistake to copy blindly the published models.

Each company should tailor its compensation committee charter to address the company's particular needs and circumstances, limiting the charter to what is truly necessary and what is feasible to accomplish in actual practice. In order to be state of the art, it is not necessary that a company have everything other companies have. A compensation committee charter should carefully be reviewed each year to prune unnecessary items and to add only those items that will, in fact, help the compensation committee members in discharging their duties.

#### A. NYSE-Listed Companies Charter Requirements

The compensation committee of a company listed on the NYSE must have a written compensation committee charter that, at a minimum, contains the required provisions specified by the NYSE listing standards.<sup>58</sup> The compensation committee charter must be approved and adopted by the board of directors and should provide:

- a description of the compensation committee's purpose. In this regard, the compensation committee charter should indicate that the compensation committee is appointed by the board of

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<sup>58</sup> A listed company of which more than 50% of the voting power is held by an individual, a group or another company is exempt from these requirements.

directors in order to discharge the responsibilities of the board of directors relating to compensation of the company's CEO, as well as the other executive officers. In addition, as applicable, it should indicate that the compensation committee is charged with overall responsibility for approving and evaluating all compensation plans, policies and programs of the company as they affect the CEO, other executive officers and significant company compensation matters and policies in general;

- that the compensation committee annually will review and approve corporate goals and objectives relevant to CEO compensation, evaluate CEO performance in light of those goals and objectives and determine and approve the CEO's overall compensation levels based on this evaluation. It also should be noted that, in determining the incentive-based components of CEO compensation, the compensation committee will consider the company's performance and relative shareholder return, the value of similar incentive awards to CEOs at comparable companies and the awards given to the CEO in past years;
- that the compensation committee will review and discuss with management the CD&A and, based on this review and analysis, determine whether or not to recommend to the board of directors the CD&A's inclusion in the company's proxy statement and annual report on Form 10-K;
- that the compensation committee has a duty to furnish the compensation committee report required by the SEC;
- that the compensation committee may, in its sole discretion, retain advisers only after taking into consideration all factors relevant to adviser independence, including the six factors set forth in Section 303A.05(c) of the NYSE-Listed Company Manual and will be directly responsible for the appointment, compensation and oversight of the adviser;
- that the company must provide for appropriate funding, as determined by the compensation committee, for payment of reasonable compensation to any advisers retained by the compensation committee;
- the compensation committee's membership requirements, including the need for member independence;
- how compensation committee members are appointed;
- how compensation committee members may be removed;
- the qualifications for compensation committee membership;
- the compensation committee's structure and operations, including authority to delegate to subcommittees;

- the procedures for compensation committee reporting to the board of directors; and
- that the compensation committee will perform an annual self-evaluation of its performance.

It also may be advisable for the charter to provide:

- that the compensation committee will, at least annually, review and approve the annual base salaries and annual incentive opportunities of the CEO and other senior executives. In particular, it should be noted that the compensation committee will review and approve the following as they affect the CEO and other senior executives: (1) all other incentive awards and opportunities, including both cash-based and equity-based awards and opportunities, (2) any employment agreements and severance arrangements, and (3) any change-in-control agreements and change-in-control provisions affecting any elements of compensation and benefits;
- that the compensation committee will receive periodic reports on the company's compensation programs as they affect all employees;
- that the compensation committee will review and approve any special or supplemental compensation and benefits for the CEO and other senior executives and individuals who formerly served as the CEO and/or as senior executives, including supplemental retirement benefits and the perquisites provided to them during and after employment;
- that the compensation committee will review and reassess the adequacy of the compensation committee charter annually and recommend any proposed changes to the board of directors for approval; and
- that the compensation committee has oversight responsibility with respect to shareholder approval of compensation plans.

*Exhibit A* to this Guide is a model compensation committee charter for NYSE-listed companies. This compensation committee charter is only a model intended to reflect required and recommended provisions for a compensation committee charter of an NYSE-listed company. Companies should customize the model to address their particular needs and circumstances.

## **B. NASDAQ-Listed Companies Charter Requirements**

The NASDAQ rules require the compensation committee of a NASDAQ-listed company to have a formal written charter. On an annual basis, the

compensation committee must review and reassess the adequacy of the charter. The charter must specify:

- the scope of the compensation committee's responsibilities, and how it carries out those responsibilities, including structure, process and membership requirements;
- the compensation committee's responsibility for determining, or recommending to the board of directors for determination, the compensation of the CEO and all other executive officers of the company;
- that the CEO may not be present during voting or deliberations on his or her compensation;
- that the compensation committee may, in its sole discretion, retain advisers only after taking into consideration factors relevant to adviser independence set forth in NASDAQ-Listing Rule 5605(d)(3) and will be directly responsible for the appointment, compensation and oversight of the adviser;
- that the company must provide for appropriate funding, as determined by the compensation committee, for payment of reasonable compensation to any advisers retained by the compensation committee; and
- that the compensation committee has oversight responsibility with respect to shareholder approval of compensation plans.

In addition to the provisions required by the NASDAQ rules to be included in the compensation committee charter, the provisions recommended above for inclusion in an NYSE-listed company charter may be a helpful blueprint. However, because every company is different, a board of directors, in conjunction with the compensation committee, should carefully consider whether inclusion of any provision is helpful in furthering the performance of the compensation committee's duties.

*Exhibit B* to this Guide is a model compensation committee charter for a NASDAQ-listed company. This compensation committee charter is only a model intended to reflect recommended provisions for a compensation committee charter of a NASDAQ-listed company. As with the model compensation committee charter provided for an NYSE-listed company, each company should customize the model to address its particular needs and circumstances.



## XI

### Director Compensation, Indemnification and Directors and Officers Insurance

#### A. Director Compensation

Director compensation is one of the more difficult issues on the corporate governance agenda and is the subject of increased attention. On the one hand, more is being expected of directors today in terms of time commitment, responsibility, exposure to public scrutiny and potential liability. On the other hand, the higher a director's pay, the greater the chance that such pay can be used against the director as evidence of a lack of true independence.

As discussed in Chapter I of this Guide, the SEC's executive compensation rules require tabular disclosure of all director compensation. The required disclosure is comparable to the extensive disclosure that is required for executive officer compensation, except that only information concerning the last fiscal year needs to be disclosed. In addition, as described in Chapter I of this Guide, narrative disclosure of a company's processes and procedures for the consideration and determination of director compensation must be provided.

The NYSE rules do not specify that responsibility for director compensation must be assigned to any particular committee. However, it should be made the responsibility of either a committee of the board of directors, such as the compensation committee or the governance and nominating committee, or the full board of directors. As discussed in Chapter II of this Guide, when directors who would directly benefit from a proposed plan are delegated with the responsibility of approving such a plan, a court will refuse the protection of the business judgment rule and scrutinize the overall fairness of the plan as it relates to the company's shareholders.<sup>59</sup> In light of this framework, we generally recommend that responsibility for adopting director compensation be delegated to a company's corporate governance and nominating committee, subject to the approval of the entire board of directors. In our experience, many companies choose to allocate these duties to the compensation committee rather than the nominating committee. In either case, the committee's decision with respect to director compensation should always be subject to overall board of director review and override. Care also should be taken that, under normal circumstances, the compensation and benefits of management are not in-

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<sup>59</sup> See, e.g., *Tate & Lyle PLC*, *supra*, at \*20-22 (invalidating rabbi trust covering both inside and outside directors because of conflict of interest).

creased at the same time as that of directors, lest doubt be cast on the validity of both actions.<sup>60</sup>

A compensation committee (or other responsible board of director committee, as applicable) should determine the form and amount of director compensation with appropriate benchmarking against peer companies. It is legal and appropriate for basic directors' fees to be supplemented by additional amounts to chairs of committees and to members of committees that meet more frequently or for longer periods of time.

Director pay has historically been limited by the view of the director as holding an independent trust and, once upon a time, the relatively limited time commitment that board service was thought to entail. Boards had generally been wary of increasing their own pay in light of the downturn in the economy and public perception. The result is that levels of director compensation have not kept pace with the realities of the current marketplace. While directors are not employees and compensation is not the main motivating factor for public company directors, given the importance of board composition and the competition for the best candidates, it is important to evaluate whether these programs are appropriate to the company's needs. Accordingly, as boards go through their self-evaluations, it is worthwhile to evaluate whether director compensation programs need adjustment consistent with the increased demands of board service, and whether they are adequate to secure top notch directors.

Companies should give careful thought to the mix between individual meeting fees and retainers. Business and regulatory demands have deepened director involvement and technology has changed the way directors meet. In view of these developments, many companies have de-emphasized per-meeting fees and instead increased retainers. Such an approach offers the dual benefits of simplifying director pay and avoiding issues that arise from electronic forms of communication and frequent, short telephonic meetings. As companies move away from per-meeting fees to retainer structures, they should consider whether additional retainer pay is appropriate for directors serving on committees that impose substantial extra demands. It is also appropriate to consider the level of time commitment required outside of meetings, including for members of audit and compensation committees who must frequently review substantial written material to be properly prepared for their meetings.

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<sup>60</sup> See *Tate & Lyle PLC v. Staley Continental, Inc.*, C.A. No. 9813, 1988 Del. Ch. LEXIS 61 (Del. Ch. May 9, 1988).

The increased responsibility imposed on directors generally is especially pronounced for non-executive board chairs, lead directors and committee chairs. Accordingly, particular attention should be paid to whether these individuals are being fairly compensated for their efforts and contribution. We expect the pay of non-executive board chairs and lead directors to increase significantly as pay practices catch up to the demands of the responsibilities of these positions. Survey data will prove useful in considering appropriate director compensation.

The importance of collegiality to the proper functioning of a board of directors must be kept in mind; director compensation should not promote factionalism on the board. Differences in compensation among directors should be fair and reasonable and reflect real differences in demands placed on particular directors.

## **B. Indemnification and Directors and Officers Insurance**

Whatever the directors' compensation program, all directors should be fully indemnified by the company to the fullest extent permitted by law and the company should purchase a reasonable amount of insurance to protect the directors against the risk of personal liability for their services to the company. Bylaws and indemnification agreements should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they provide the fullest coverage permitted by law. Directors also can continue to rely on their exculpation for personal liability for breaches of the duty of care under charter provisions put in place pursuant to Section 102(b)(7) of the Delaware General Corporation Law and similar statutes in other states.

Directors and Officers ("D&O") insurance coverage, of course, provides a key protection to directors. While such coverage is becoming more expensive, it is still available in most instances, and remains highly useful, despite some recent decisions construing the terms of D&O policies less favorably to the insured. D&O policies are not strictly form documents; they can be negotiated. Careful attention should be paid to retentions and exclusions, particularly those that seek to limit coverage based upon a lack of adequate insurance for other business matters, or based on assertions that a company's financial statements were inaccurate when the policy was issued. Care also should be given to the potential impact of a bankruptcy of the company on the availability of insurance, particularly the question of how rights are allocated between the company and the directors and officers who may be claiming entitlement to the same aggregate dollars of coverage. To avoid any ambiguity that might exist as to directors' and officers' rights to coverage and reimbursement of expenses in the case of a bankruptcy, many companies are purchasing separate supplemental insurance policies covering only directors and officers but not the

company (so-called side-A coverage) in addition to their normal policies, which cover both the company and the directors and officers individually.

## EXHIBIT A

### COMPENSATION COMMITTEE CHARTER<sup>61</sup> (NYSE-Listed Company)

#### Purpose

The Compensation Committee (the “Committee”) is appointed by the Board of Directors (the “Board”) to discharge the Board’s responsibilities relating to compensation of [Name of Company] (the “Company”) Chief Executive Officer (the “CEO”) and the Company’s other executive officers (collectively, including the CEO, the “Executive Officers”). The Committee has overall responsibility for approving and evaluating all compensation plans, policies and programs of the Company as they affect the Executive Officers.<sup>62</sup>

#### Compensation Committee Membership

The Committee shall consist of no fewer than three members. The members of the Committee shall meet the independence requirements of the New York Stock Exchange (the “NYSE”). At least two members of the Committee also shall qualify as “outside” directors within the meaning of Internal Revenue Code Section 162(m) and as “non-employee” directors within the meaning of Rule 16b-3 under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> A compensation committee charter must be adopted by the board of directors.

<sup>62</sup> While the NYSE’s Listed Company Manual provides that all CEO-related compensation must be determined either by a compensation committee alone or by a compensation committee together with the other independent directors (as directed by the board of directors), the NYSE Listed Company Manual expressly permits discussion of CEO compensation with the board of directors generally. See NYSE Listed Company Manual, Section 303A.5(b) and Commentary.

<sup>63</sup> Only two members need to conform to the membership requirements of Internal Revenue Code Section 162(m) and/or Rule 16b-3 of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended (the “Exchange Act”) because satisfaction of such membership requirements may be accomplished by the delegation of the relevant decisions to a conforming two-person subcommittee or by the recusal or abstention of the non-conforming members if at least two conforming members remain. See PLR 9811029 (Dec. 9, 1997); American Society of Corporate Secretaries, 1996 SEC No-Act, LEXIS 910 (Dec. 11, 1996).

In addition, compliance with the membership requirements of Internal Revenue Code Section 162(m) is only necessary to the extent that the board of directors determines that it is in the best interests of the Company to qualify for the performance-based exemption to the non-deductibility of individual compensation payments in excess of \$1 million made to the CEO and the next four highest paid officers (other than the CFO). In addition, compliance with the membership requirements of Rule 16b-3 of the Exchange Act is

(footnote continued)

The members of the Committee shall be appointed by the Board on the recommendation of the Nominating & Governance Committee. One member of the Committee shall be appointed as Committee Chairman by the Board. Committee members may be replaced by the Board.

### **Meetings**

The Committee shall meet as often as necessary to carry out its responsibilities. The Committee Chairman shall preside at each meeting. In the event the Committee Chairman is not present at a meeting, the Committee members present at that meeting shall designate one of its members as the acting chair of such meeting.

### **Committee Responsibilities and Authority**

1. The Committee shall annually review and approve corporate goals and objectives relevant to CEO compensation, evaluate the CEO's performance in light of those goals and objectives and determine and approve the CEO's compensation level based on this evaluation. In determining the incentive components of CEO compensation, the Committee may consider a number of factors, including, but not limited to, the Company's performance and relative shareholder return, the value of similar incentive awards to CEOs at comparable companies and the awards given to the CEO in past years.
2. The Committee shall, at least annually, review and approve the annual base salaries and annual incentive opportunities of the Executive Officers.
3. The Committee shall, periodically and as and when appropriate, review and approve the following as they affect the Executive Officers: (a) all other incentive awards and opportunities, including both cash-based and equity-based awards and opportunities; (b) any employment agreements and severance arrangements; (c) any change-in-control agreements and severance protection plans and change-in-control provisions affecting any elements of compensation and benefits; and (d) any special or supplemental compensation and benefits for the Executive Officers and individuals who formerly served as Executive Officers, including supplemental re-

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(footnote continued)

not the only means available to the board of directors to ensure that grants or awards to company officers fall within the Rule 16b-3 short-swing profit safe harbor from Exchange Act Section 16(b) liability. The safe harbor also is available if the grants or awards are approved by the full board of directors if the securities issued to the officers are held by the officers for at least six months or if a majority of the shareholders approve or ratify the grants or awards by the next annual meeting of shareholders.

tirement benefits and the perquisites provided to them during and after employment.

4. The Committee shall review and discuss the Compensation Discussion and Analysis (the “CD&A”) required to be included in the Company’s proxy statement and annual report on Form 10-K by the rules and regulations of the Securities and Exchange Commission (the “SEC”) with management, and, based on such review and discussion, determine whether or not to recommend to the Board that the CD&A be so included.
5. The Committee shall produce the annual Compensation Committee Report for inclusion in the Company’s proxy statement in compliance with the rules and regulations promulgated by the SEC.
6. The Committee shall oversee the Company’s compliance with SEC rules and regulations regarding shareholder approval of certain executive compensation matters, including advisory votes on executive compensation and the frequency of such votes, and the requirement under NYSE rules that, with limited exceptions, shareholders approve equity compensation plans.
7. The Committee shall receive periodic reports on the Company’s compensation programs as they affect all employees.
8. The Committee shall make regular reports to the Board.
9. The Committee shall annually review its own performance.
10. The Committee shall have the sole authority to retain and terminate (or obtain the advice of) any adviser to assist it in the performance of its duties, but only after taking into consideration all factors relevant to the adviser’s independence from management, including those specified in Section 303A.05(c) of the NYSE Listed Company Manual. The Committee shall be directly responsible for the appointment, compensation and oversight of the work of any adviser retained by the Committee, and shall have sole authority to approve the adviser’s fees and the other terms and conditions of the adviser’s retention. The Company must provide for appropriate funding, as determined by the Committee, for payment of reasonable compensation to any adviser retained by the Committee.
11. The Committee may form and delegate authority and duties to subcommittees as it deems appropriate.





## EXHIBIT B

### COMPENSATION COMMITTEE CHARTER<sup>64</sup> (NASDAQ-Listed Company)

#### Purpose

The Compensation Committee (the “Committee”) is appointed by the Board of Directors (the “Board”) to discharge the Board’s responsibilities relating to compensation of [Name of Company] (the “Company”) Chief Executive Officer (the “CEO”) and the Company’s other executive officers (collectively, including the CEO, the “Executive Officers”). The Committee has overall responsibility for approving and evaluating all compensation plans, policies and programs of the Company as they affect the Executive Officers.

#### Committee Membership

The Committee shall consist of no fewer than three members. The members of the Committee shall meet the independence requirements of the NASDAQ Stock Market.

At least two members of the Committee also shall qualify as “outside” directors within the meaning of Internal Revenue Code Section 162(m) and as “non-employee” directors within the meaning of Rule 16b-3 under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> A compensation committee charter must be adopted by the board of directors.

<sup>65</sup> Only two members need conform to the membership requirements of Internal Revenue Code Section 162(m) and/or Rule 16b-3 of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended (the “Exchange Act”), because satisfaction of those membership requirements may be accomplished by the delegation of the relevant decisions to a conforming two-person subcommittee or by the recusal or abstention of the non-conforming members if at least two conforming members remain. *See* PLR 9811029 (Dec. 9, 1997); American Society of Corporate Secretaries, 1996 SEC No-Act, LEXIS 910 (Dec. 11, 1996).

In addition, compliance with the membership requirements of Internal Revenue Code Section 162(m) is only necessary to the extent that the board of directors determines that it is in the best interests of the Company to qualify for the performance-based exemption to the non-deductibility of individual compensation payments in excess of \$1 million made to the CEO and the next four highest paid officers (other than the CFO). In addition, compliance with the membership requirements of Exchange Act Rule 16b-3 is not the only means available to the board of directors to ensure that grants or awards to company officers fall within the Rule 16b-3 short-swing profit safe harbor from Exchange Act Section 16(b) liability. The safe harbor also is available if the grants or awards are approved by the full board of directors, if the securities issued to the officers are held by the officers for at least six months or if a majority of the shareholders approve or ratify the grants or awards by the next annual meeting of shareholders.

The members of the Committee shall be appointed by the Board on the recommendation of the Nominating & Governance Committee. One member of the Committee shall be appointed as Committee Chairman by the Board. Committee members may be replaced by the Board.

### **Meetings**

The Committee shall meet as often as necessary to carry out its responsibilities. The Committee Chairman shall preside at each meeting. In the event the Committee Chairman is not present at a meeting, the Committee members present at that meeting shall designate one of its members as the acting chair of such meeting.

### **Committee Responsibilities and Authority**

1. The Committee shall, at least annually, review and approve the annual base salaries and annual incentive opportunities of the Executive Officers. The CEO shall not be present during any Committee deliberations or voting with respect to his or her compensation.
2. The Committee shall, periodically and as and when appropriate, review and approve the following as they affect the Executive Officers: (a) all other incentive awards and opportunities, including both cash-based and equity-based awards and opportunities; (b) any employment agreements and severance arrangements; (c) any change-in-control agreements and severance protection plans and change-in-control provisions affecting any elements of compensation and benefits; and (d) any special or supplemental compensation and benefits for the Executive Officers and individuals who formerly served as Executive Officers, including supplemental retirement benefits and the perquisites provided to them during and after employment.
3. The Committee shall review and discuss the Compensation Discussion and Analysis (the "CD&A") required to be included in the Company's proxy statement and annual report on Form 10-K by the rules and regulations of the Securities and Exchange Commission (the "SEC") with management, and, based on such review and discussion, determine whether or not to recommend to the Board that the CD&A be so included.
4. The Committee shall produce the annual Compensation Committee Report for inclusion in the Company's proxy statement in compliance with the rules and regulations promulgated by the SEC.
5. The Committee shall monitor the Company's compliance with the requirements under the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 relating to loans to directors and officers, and with all other applicable laws affecting employee compensation and benefits.

6. The Committee shall oversee the Company's compliance with SEC rules and regulations regarding shareholder approval of certain executive compensation matters, including advisory votes on executive compensation and the frequency of such votes, and the requirement under the NASDAQ rules that, with limited exceptions, shareholders approve equity compensation plans.
7. The Committee shall receive periodic reports on the Company's compensation programs as they affect all employees.
8. The Committee shall make regular reports to the Board.
9. The Committee shall have the authority, in its sole discretion, to retain and terminate (or obtain the advice of) any adviser to assist it in the performance of its duties, but only after taking into consideration factors relevant to the adviser's independence from management specified in NASDAQ Listing Rule 5605(d)(3). The Committee shall be directly responsible for the appointment, compensation and oversight of the work of any adviser retained by the Committee, and shall have sole authority to approve the adviser's fees and the other terms and conditions of the adviser's retention. The Company must provide for appropriate funding, as determined by the Committee, for payment of reasonable compensation to any adviser retained by the Committee.
10. The Committee may form and delegate authority and duties to subcommittees as it deems appropriate.