

Response Form
for the
Consultation Paper on the development of the
CFA Institute ESG Disclosure Standards for Investment Products

CFA Institute is developing a voluntary, global industry standard, the CFA Institute ESG Disclosure Standards for Investment Products (the “Standard”), to establish disclosure requirements for investment products with ESG-related features. The purpose of the Standard is to provide greater transparency and comparability for investors by enabling asset managers to clearly communicate the ESG-related features of their investment products. The goal for this Consultation Paper is to elicit feedback on the proposed scope, structure, and design principles of the Standard. **All comments must be received by 19 October 2020 in order to be considered.**

Providing Feedback

Public commentary on this Consultation Paper will help shape an Exposure Draft, the initial version of the Standard, which is expected to be issued in May 2021. Comments should be provided in this response form. You may address as few or as many of the Consultation Paper’s questions as you wish. Unless otherwise requested, all comments will be posted on the CFA Institute website.

Guidelines for submission

Comments are most useful when they:

- directly address a specific issue or question,
- provide a rationale and support for the opinions expressed, and
- suggest alternative solutions in the event of disagreement.

There is a section for general comments at the end of this response form.

Positive comments in support of a proposal are equally as helpful as those that provide constructive suggestions for improvement.

Requirements for submission

For comments to be considered, please adhere to the following requirements:

- Insert responses to numbered questions in the designated areas of the response form. Please do not remove tags of the type <QUESTION_XX>. Your response to each question must be framed by the two tags corresponding to the question. If you do not wish to respond to a given question, please do not delete it but simply leave the text “ENTER RESPONSE HERE” between the tags.
- Provide all comments in English.
- Assign a unique file name to your response form.
- Submit the response form as a Microsoft Word document.
- Submit the response form to standards@cfainstitute.org by 5:00 PM E.T. on 19 October 2020.

General Information (required)

Respondent: <i>(Please enter your full name if you are submitting as an individual or the name of the organization if you are submitting on behalf of an organization.)</i>	RBC Global Asset Management
Stakeholder Group: <i>(Please select the stakeholder group with which you most closely identify.)</i>	Asset Manager
Region: <i>(If you are submitting as an individual, please select the region in which you live. If you are submitting on behalf of an organization and the organization has a significant presence in multiple regions, please select "Global". Otherwise, please select the region in which the organization has its main office.)</i>	Global
Country: <i>(If you are submitting as an individual, please enter the country in which you live. If you are submitting on behalf of an organization, please enter the country in which the organization has its main office.)</i>	Canada
Confidentiality Preference: <i>(Please select your preference for whether your response is published on the CFA Institute website.)</i>	yes, my response may be published

Consultation Paper Questions

Market Needs

Question 1: Do you agree that a standard is needed to help investors better understand and compare investment products with ESG-related features?

<QUESTION_01>

Yes. Ambiguous terminology and inconsistent standards may lead to erosion of trust in the industry, both specific to ESG-related investment products and more widely.

<QUESTION_01>

Terminology

Question 2: Are any of the defined terms ambiguous? If so, how could they be clarified?

<QUESTION_02>

No.

<QUESTION_02>

Purpose and Scope

Question 3: In addition to the examples listed in Table 1, which regulations and standards, either in existence or in development, should be considered during the development of the Standard to avoid duplication or conflict and to ensure alignment and referencing if and when applicable?

<QUESTION_03>

N/A

<QUESTION_03>

Question 4: Do you agree that a disclosure-based approach would be more helpful to achieve the Standard's goals of transparency and comparability than a prescriptive-based approach?

<QUESTION_04>

Yes.

<QUESTION_04>

Question 5: Do you agree that the Standard should focus only on product-level disclosures and not firm-level disclosures?

<QUESTION_05>

Yes.

<QUESTION_05>

Question 6: Do you agree that an asset manager should be permitted to choose the investment products to which they apply the Standard rather than be required to apply the Standard to all their investment products with ESG-related features?

<QUESTION_06>

Yes.

<QUESTION_06>

Design Principles

Question 7: Do you agree with the design principles for definitions of ESG-related terms?

<QUESTION_07>

Yes.

<QUESTION_07>

Question 8: Do you agree with the design principles for disclosure requirements?

<QUESTION_08>

Yes. In regard to “*Disclosure requirements should allow asset managers the flexibility to make the required disclosure in the clearest possible manner given the nature of the product*” there is reference to open-ended and closed-ended questions. Questions should be closed-ended so there are definitive Yes/No statements, but with the option to provide further context.

<QUESTION_08>

Question 9: Should the Standard require that all disclosures be made in a single document? If disclosures were spread across multiple documents, would that pose a challenge for investors to understand and compare investment products?

<QUESTION_09>

For investors, it would be beneficial for asset managers to have the ability to provide a single summary document with the required disclosures. In some markets, the proposed disclosures could be added to existing regulatory disclosures for efficiency. However, the CFA Institute will need to consider the disclosure requirements in different markets, as not all markets may have the aforementioned opportunity.

<QUESTION_09>

Question 10: Do you agree with the design principle for independent examination?

<QUESTION_10>

Yes

<QUESTION_10>

Question 11: Should independent examination be required, or should it be recommended as best practice but ultimately left to the discretion of the asset manager?

<QUESTION_11>

It should only be left to the discretion of the asset manager.

<QUESTION_11>

Question 12: Should the independent examiner (i) examine the disclosures relative to only the design of the investment product, or (ii) examine the disclosures relative to both the design and implementation of the investment product?

<QUESTION_12>

The level of examination (i or ii) should left to the discretion of the asset manager and the asset manager should disclose the level of examination.

<QUESTION_12>

Proposal for General Disclosure Requirements

Question 13: Do you agree with the scope of the general disclosure requirements? Are there topics that should be added, deleted, or modified?

<QUESTION_13>

Would require greater clarification on what is meant by the *“Time horizon of the ESG investment analysis”*.

<QUESTION_13>

Question 14: Should the disclosure requirements address an investment product’s intention to align with policy goals, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and if so, should these requirements be part of general disclosure requirements or feature-specific disclosure requirements?

<QUESTION_14>

No.

<QUESTION_14>

Question 15: Should the disclosure requirements include an explanation of whether, and if so how, an investment product considers principal adverse impacts on sustainability factors and where to find additional information, as required by Article 7 of Regulation EU 2019/2088 Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation?

<QUESTION_15>

No.

<QUESTION_15>

Proposal for ESG-Related Features and Feature-Specific Disclosure Requirements

Question 16: Do you believe that “ESG Integration” is a clear and appropriate name for this feature? If not, please suggest an alternative and explain why it would be a better choice.

<QUESTION_16>

Yes.

<QUESTION_16>

Question 17: If an investment product had Feature (A), and only Feature (A), as defined above, would it be consistent with the CFA institute policy paper “Positions on Environmental, Social, and Governance Integration”? In other words, would it be clear that material ESG-related factors are considered alongside traditional financial factors solely for the purpose of seeking to improve risk-adjusted returns? If not, please suggest how that could be made clearer.

<QUESTION_17>

Yes.

<QUESTION_17>

Question 18: Is Feature (A) clearly defined? If not, please explain how the definition could be made clearer or more precise.

<QUESTION_18>

No. The definition itself should definitively state that ESG integration does not equate to the automatic exclusion (Feature (B)) or inclusion (Feature (C)) of companies from/into the portfolio based on ESG-related features. This is a common misconception in the market.

<QUESTION_18>

Question 19: Do you agree with the issues to be addressed by the disclosure requirements specific to Feature (A)? Are there issues that should be added, deleted, or modified?

<QUESTION_19>

No, **we do not agree**. For an ESG integrated product, it is difficult to practically and feasibly isolate ESG factors through performance attribution without either a) the use of an internal ESG scoring metric with a formulaic impact on the investment decision or b) the use of third-party ESG scores (which the investment manager may not agree with). As set out in the proposed definition, ESG integration considers ESG-related factors alongside traditional factors. Whether through security selection, regional allocation, sector allocation or otherwise, ESG-related factors may only be one piece of the investment decision.

<QUESTION_19>

Question 20: Do you believe that “ESG-related Exclusions” is a clear and appropriate name for this feature? If not, please suggest an alternative and explain why it would be a better choice.

<QUESTION_20>

Yes.

<QUESTION_20>

Question 21: Are “negative screening” and “norms-based screening” similar enough, particularly in the types of issues to be addressed by disclosure requirements, that they can both be covered by Feature (B) ESG-Related Exclusions? If you prefer that they be two separate features, please explain the key differences in function, benefits, and disclosure requirements.

<QUESTION_21>

No. Norms-based screens are often applied firm-wide, whereas negative screens may be more product specific. As a result, some asset managers may need to label each individual product using ESG-Related Exclusions, which may be misleading for the investor. Further, norms-based screens may be legally required for the asset manager rather than to meet an ESG Need of the investor.

<QUESTION_21>

Question 22: Is Feature (B) clearly defined? If not, please suggest how the definition could be made clearer or more precise.

<QUESTION_22>

Yes, we would encourage distinguishing between negative screening and norms-based screening (see Question 21).

<QUESTION_22>

Question 23: Do you agree with the issues to be addressed by the disclosure requirements specific to Feature (B)? Are there issues that should be added, deleted, or modified?

<QUESTION_23>

Yes.

<QUESTION_23>

Question 24: Do you believe that “Best-in-Class” is a clear and appropriate name for this feature? If not, is “Positive ESG Performance Profile” a better name? If you dislike both of these names, please suggest an alternative and explain why it would be a better choice.

<QUESTION_24>

Yes.

<QUESTION_24>

Question 25: Do you agree that Feature (C) is distinct enough, particularly in the types of issues to be addressed by disclosure requirements, that it should be separate from other features? If not, please suggest the feature with which it should be combined.

<QUESTION_25>

Yes.

<QUESTION_25>

Question 26: Is Feature (C) clearly defined? If not, please explain how the definition could be made clearer or more precise.

<QUESTION_26>

No. The definition should incorporate some of the content under “Feature Name and Code” to better distinguish it from Feature (A) - ESG Integration. Feature (C) is a rules-based approach to deliberately invest in securities with positive performance on ESG metrics as a mandate.

<QUESTION_26>

Question 27: Do you agree with the issues to be addressed by the disclosure requirements specific to Feature (C)? Are there issues that should be added, deleted, or modified?

<QUESTION_27>

Yes, but the CFA Institute should consider that some products may be using internally-generated scores, metrics or weightings, not only third-party vendor scores.

<QUESTION_27>

Question 28: Do you believe that “ESG-related Thematic Focus” is a clear and appropriate name for this feature? If not, please suggest an alternative and explain why it would be a better choice.

<QUESTION_28>

Yes.

<QUESTION_28>

Question 29: Do you agree Feature (D) is distinct enough, particularly in the types of issues to be addressed by disclosure requirements, that it should be separate from other features? If not, please suggest the feature with which it should be combined.

<QUESTION_29>

Yes.

<QUESTION_29>

Question 30: Is Feature (D) clearly defined? If not, please explain how the definition could be made clearer or more precise.

<QUESTION_30>

No. There is potential overlap between Features (C) and (D), which may come down to the intentionality of the product, which can be addressed by the definition. For instance, if an asset manager’s product invests in companies with lower relative emissions than peers, it could be because (a) the manager is seeking exposure to the structural trend of a low-carbon transition, (b) because the manager wants to provide a product that invests in companies that perform better than peers on this ESG-related feature, or (c) both.

<QUESTION_30>

Question 31: Do you agree with the issues to be addressed by the disclosure requirements specific to Feature (D)? Are there issues that should be added, deleted, or modified?

<QUESTION_31>

Yes.

<QUESTION_31>

Question 32: Do you believe that “Impact Objective” is a clear and appropriate name for this feature? If not, please suggest an alternative and explain why it would be a better choice.

<QUESTION_32>

Yes.

<QUESTION_32>

Question 33: Is Feature (E) clearly defined? If not, please explain how the definition could be made clearer or more precise.

<QUESTION_33>

Yes, but we would like to flag that this Feature in particular is susceptible to “greenwashing”. The Feature should also clearly be distinguished from Feature (A) - ESG Integration, Feature (F) - Proxy Voting, Engagement and Stewardship, and Feature (D) – ESG-Related Thematic Focus. For instance, if a product is invested in most of the S&P 500 index but engages with investee companies to increase board and executive diversity as an objective, how is that distinguished from a product that only invests in environmental solutions for local communities? In both cases, the environmental or social outputs are measurable. To clarify, the intention of the product’s holdings should be included (e.g. Investing in securities of issuers that intend to generate a measurable positive social or environmental impact.)

<QUESTION_33>

Question 34: Do you agree with the issues to be addressed by the disclosure requirements specific to Feature (E)? Are there issues that should be added, deleted, or modified?

<QUESTION_34>

Yes.

<QUESTION_34>

Question 35: Do you believe that “Proxy Voting, Engagement, and Stewardship” is a clear and appropriate name for this feature? If not, please suggest an alternative and explain why it would be a better choice.

<QUESTION_35>

Yes.

<QUESTION_35>

Question 36: Do you agree that “Proxy Voting, Engagement, and Stewardship” should be a distinct feature? If not, would you prefer that the types of issues to be addressed by disclosure requirements be redistributed to other features or to general disclosures?

<QUESTION_36>

Yes.

<QUESTION_36>

Question 37: Is Feature (F) clearly defined? If not, please explain how the definition could be made clearer or more precise.

<QUESTION_37>

Yes.

<QUESTION_37>

Question 38: Do you agree with the issues to be addressed by the disclosure requirements specific to Feature (F)? Are there issues that should be added, deleted, or modified?

<QUESTION_38>

Yes.

<QUESTION_38>

Question 39: Do the six features described fully cover the spectrum of ESG-related features currently offered in the marketplace?

<QUESTION_39>

Yes.

<QUESTION_39>

Proposal for Classification of ESG-Related Features According to ESG-Related Needs

Question 40: Does this list of ESG-related needs represent the spectrum of investors' ESG-related needs?

<QUESTION_40>

Yes.

<QUESTION_40>

Question 41: Are these five ESG-related needs clearly differentiated and mutually exclusive?

<QUESTION_41>

Yes, but communication and clarity will be key on how an investor can have multiple ESG-related Needs (note that before the Table, it states that these Needs are *not* mutually exclusive). The first Need, which aligns with Feature (A) - ESG Integration, leaves it open for the common misconception that by considering material ESG factors, the product is only investing in “good ESG” companies. Similar to the ESG Integration definition, this may require further detail to distinguish it from other Needs. There is also potential overlap between Needs 3 and 5.

<QUESTION_41>

Question 42: Do you agree with the classification of ESG-related features according to ESG-related needs, as shown in Table 3? If not, how might it be improved?

<QUESTION_42>

No. We question the alignment between Feature (F) and Need 3. Alignment of Feature (F) and Need 5 will depend on the CFA Institute’s interpretation of impact objectives and if impact objectives obtained through direct investment in dedicated companies/projects is equal to engaging and proxy voting on similar themes as an objective.

<QUESTION_42>

Users and Benefits

Question 43: Do you agree with the description of user benefits? Are there any benefits that should be added or deleted?

<QUESTION_43>

Yes.

<QUESTION_43>

Question 44: Do you agree with the terms used to define the users of the Standard? Are there any terms we should include, or avoid using?

<QUESTION_44>

Yes.

<QUESTION_44>

General Comments: Please enter general comments below.

<GENERAL_COMMENTS>

ENTER RESPONSE HERE

<GENERAL_COMMENTS>