

IN THIS ISSUE

Economic Snapshot

Strategic Asset Allocation Models

Why Everyone Needs...
(continued from page 1)

2

3

4

Commerce Concepts

Market Updates, Asset Allocation, and Investment Education for Plan Participants and Individuals

Why Everyone Needs an Estate Plan

Many people believe that wills and estate planning are only for the wealthy. In reality, estate planning is important for everyone. Regardless of how much money you earn or what you own, planning ahead can protect your loved ones, reduce stress, and ensure that your wishes are respected.

At its simplest, a will is a legal document that explains what should happen to your belongings after you die. Comprehensive estate planning goes a bit further and may include naming guardians for children, planning for medical decisions, and preparing for the possibility of incapacity. These steps are not about wealth; they are about responsibility and peace of mind.

Everyone Has an Estate

Your estate includes more than just money. It can include your home, car, life insurance, personal items, and even digital assets such as online accounts or photos. Even if these things seem modest, they still matter to you, and to the people you care about.

If you die without a will, state laws decide who receives your property. This may not match your wishes. For example, stepchildren, close friends, or your partner (if you are unmarried) may receive nothing, even if they were central to your life. A simple will allows you, not the state, to decide who gets what.

A will is not a one-time document. It should be reviewed and potentially revised after life events such as marriage, divorce, births, adoptions, or major purchases such as a home.

Protecting Family and Loved Ones

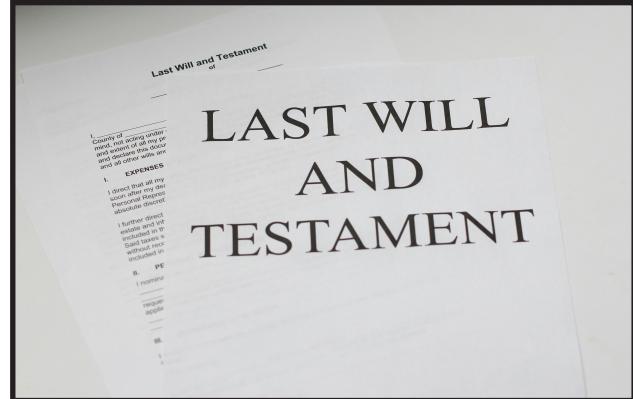
For parents, estate planning is especially important. One of the most critical decisions you can make in this process is naming a guardian for minor children. Without a will, a court will choose who will raise your children if something happens to you. While courts try to act in a child's best interests, they may not name the person you would have selected.

Even for adults without children, a will helps prevent family conflict. Clear instructions reduce confusion and disagreements among relatives at an already emotional time. When your wishes are written down and legally valid, loved ones are less likely to argue about what you "would have wanted."

Dying without a will can make settling your estate a longer, more expensive, and more stressful process. Court fees, delays, and legal complications can reduce the value of what you leave behind. This is especially harmful for families who were relying on the deceased person's income and assets. A well-prepared estate plan can help ensure that money and property reach the right people more efficiently. This can be crucial when survivors need quick access to funds for housing, daily expenses, or funeral costs.

You need not, and should not, wait until your later years to create a will. Life is unpredictable, and estate planning is relevant at every stage of adulthood. Young adults may want to specify who receives their belongings or who can make decisions on their

continued on page 4...



WIN A \$25 GIFT CARD

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[thecommco.com/
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for the answer to last issue's question.

Market Update

Through December 31, 2025

		Trailing Returns			
		3 mos	12 mos	5 yrs	10 yrs
Blue Chip US Stocks	Dow Jones Industrial Average	4.03%	14.92%	11.58%	13.11%
Large Company US Stocks	S&P 500	2.66%	17.88%	14.42%	14.82%
Small Company US Stocks	Russell 2000	2.19%	12.81%	6.09%	9.62%
Non-US Stocks	MSCI EAFE (Gross Div)	4.91%	31.89%	9.47%	8.72%
US Bonds	Bloomberg US Aggregate	1.10%	7.30%	-0.36%	2.01%
Cash Alternatives	ICE B of A 3 Month US Tsy Bill	0.97%	4.18%	3.17%	2.18%

Economic Snapshot

Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

Growth should strengthen, supported by incentives in recent legislation and the already strong performance coming from AI-related investment.

Manufacturing

The manufacturing sector will continue to struggle, despite higher tariffs and large investments over the last several years having the potential to improve the sector's performance.

Employment

The labor market will remain relatively weak in 2026 due to the reduction in immigration and increase in deportations. We expect labor-intensive sectors of the economy such as construction, retail, and hospitality to struggle to find workers.

Housing and Construction

Despite slightly lower mortgage rates, housing affordability and lack of home construction will keep this sector's contribution to economic growth limited.

Inflation

While not expected to increase by much in 2026, inflation will most likely remain above the Fed's target for a sixth consecutive year.

Monetary Policy

The Federal Reserve will probably cut the federal funds rate once in 2026, but the bar to meet for demonstrating that need will be high.

Investment Strategy Quarterly: Published by Raymond James and Associates, January 2026. For a complete PDF copy of the current issue of Investment Strategy Quarterly, [click here](#) or email newsletter@thecommco.com.

December Market Review

- For the third consecutive year (and sixth out of the past seven) the S&P 500 tallied double-digit gains. As the index climbed 16.39% for the year, it also recorded 38 new record highs.
- Along with a plethora of data releases once the government reopened, December saw markets navigate the Federal Reserve's third consecutive interest rate cut of 2025. The Fed acted to support a cooling labor market amid persistently elevated inflation, while noting that the recent government shutdown left policymakers working with incomplete data. Division remains within the Fed, as some policymakers prioritize addressing labor market softness while others caution against reigniting inflation.
- As we head into 2026, the outlook is positive but not without challenges. Cooling inflation and tech tailwinds offer reason for optimism, while a softer job market and policy uncertainty may bring some volatility. After several years of exceptional gains, returns could slow, but steady growth and healthy companies suggest the foundation remains solid.

Indexes are unmanaged and cannot be invested in directly. Past results are not predictive of future results. Individual results will vary. The trailing returns shown include dividends. See page four for index definitions.

Source: Raymond James Financial Services

To be entered into a drawing to win a \$25 GIFT CARD, email free@thecommco.com with the answer to this question:

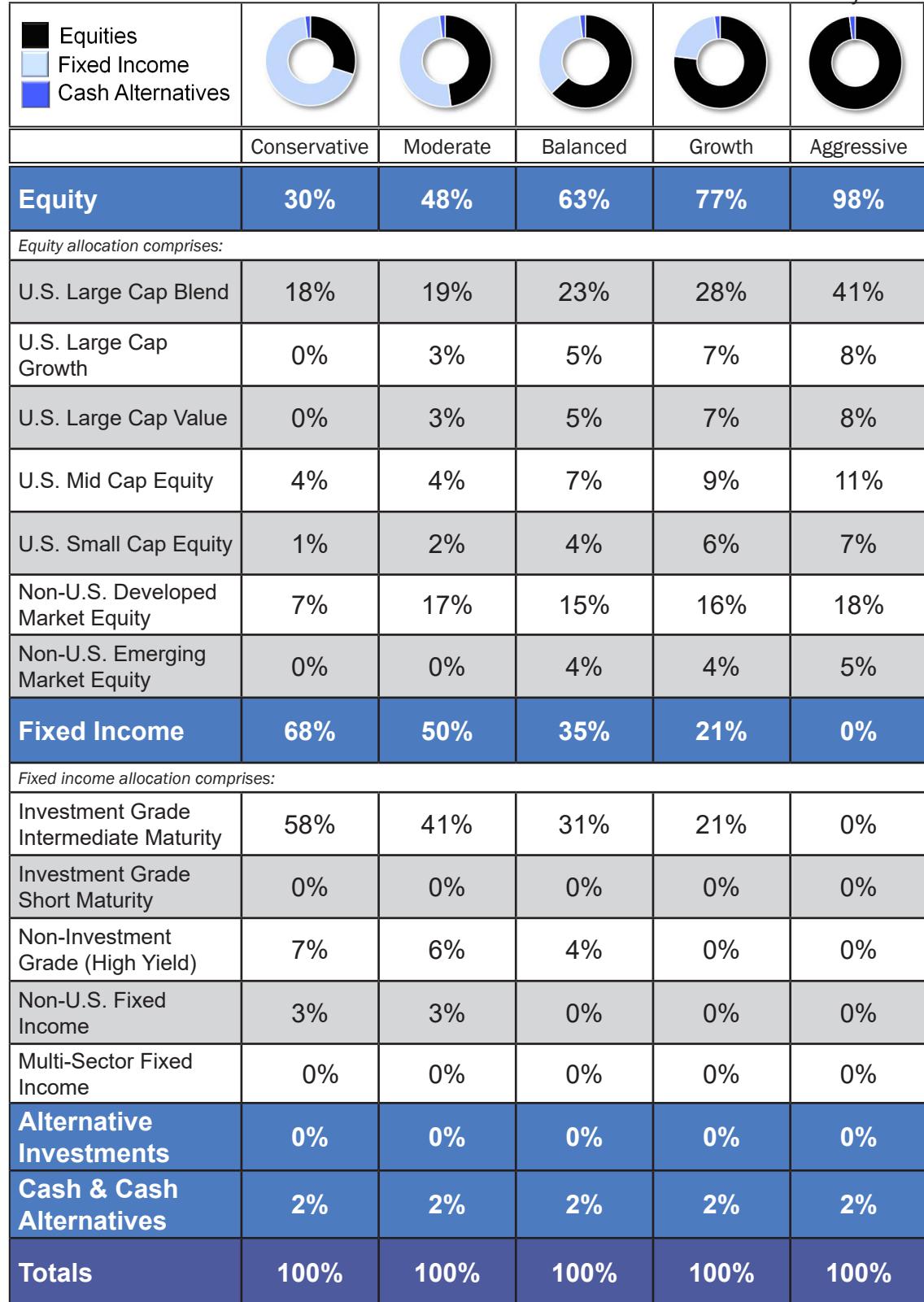
How can dying without a will reduce the value of your estate?

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Strategic Asset Allocation Models

As of January 2026

For additional asset allocation and disclosure information, please [click here](#) or visit the Resources section of our website at thecommco.com



These asset allocation targets are based on our changing views of the risk and return in the various asset classes, looking out over three or more years. The models assume fully allocated portfolios and do not take into account outside assets, additional cash reserves held independent of these models, or any actual investor's unique circumstances. Investors should consult their financial advisor to decide how these models might assist in the development of their individual portfolios. Material is provided for informational purposes only and does not constitute a recommendation.

Index definitions: The S&P 500 is an unmanaged index of 500 widely held stocks that is generally considered representative of the U.S. stock market. The Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA), commonly known as "The Dow" is an index representing 30 stock of companies maintained and reviewed by the editors of the Wall Street Journal. The Russell 2000 Index measures the performance of the 2,000 smallest companies in the Russell 3000 Index, which represent approximately 8% of the total market capitalization of the Russell 3000 Index. The MSCI EAFE (Europe, Australasia, and Far East) is a free float-adjusted market capitalization index that is designed to measure developed market equity performance, excluding the United States & Canada. The EAFE consists of the country indices of 22 developed nations. The Barclays US Aggregate Bond Index is a broad-based flagship benchmark that measures the investment grade, US dollar-denominated, fixed-rate taxable bond market. The ICE BofAML 3-Month US Treasury Bill index consists of a single issue that is purchased at the beginning of the month and held for a full month. At month's end, that issue is sold and rolled into a newly selected issue, which is the outstanding Treasury Bill that matures closest to, but not beyond, three months from the rebalancing date. The selected issue must have settled on or before the month-end rebalancing date. Past performance may not be indicative of future results. An investment cannot be made in these indexes. The performance mentioned does not include fees and charges, which would reduce an investor's returns.



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continued from page 1...

behalf. Middle-aged adults may be supporting children, aging parents, or both. Older adults may want to review and update plans to reflect changing circumstances.

Planning for Incapacity, Not Just Death

Estate planning is not only about what happens after you die. It also helps protect you while you are alive. Documents such as a power of attorney or healthcare directive allow you to choose who will make financial or medical decisions for you if you are unable to do so yourself due to illness or injury.

Without these documents, your family may have to go to court to gain the authority to help you. This can cause delays, expenses, and emotional strain at a time when quick decisions may be needed.

Estate Planning Is More Affordable Than You Think

Another common misconception is that estate planning is expensive. While complex estates may require advanced legal work, many people can create a basic will and related documents at a reasonable cost. Some employers offer legal benefits, and many communities provide access to affordable legal services. You may also be able to find inexpensive template documents online that you can customize, rather than hiring a professional to draft a plan from scratch. The cost of planning ahead is often far less than the financial and emotional cost of leaving matters unresolved.

A Final Act of Care

At its heart, estate planning is an act of care and consideration. It spares your loved ones from uncertainty and difficult decisions. It ensures that your values, priorities, and relationships are honored. No matter your income level, you have a legacy—one defined not just by possessions, but by responsibility and foresight.

Creating a will and an estate plan is not about being morbid or expecting the worst. It is about being prepared, asserting control, and protecting those you care about.

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