Managing and investing the endowment

The endowment portfolio is invested by UMF Investment Advisors (UMFIA), a nonprofit subsidiary formed by UMF’s Board of Trustees in 1998 to provide dedicated, professional active portfolio management. UMFIA has a board of directors that includes representation from the UMF Board of Trustees as well as from UMF leadership (see back page).

Investment strategy
The UMF endowment portfolio is uniquely structured and managed to meet two goals: preserve the real purchasing power of endowed gifts for the long term while simultaneously supporting a meaningful and dependable rate of spending, currently 4.5% of a fund’s average market value over the previous 20 quarters. The goal is to maintain stability and capture equity-like returns over the long term, while avoiding the effects of sharp and prolonged market declines. This means that, while on average, UMF’s returns will not experience the highest highs, they will also avoid the lowest lows. This strategy is designed to create predictable and stable funding over the long term; however, year-to-year short-term results will often look different from those of our peers and the standardized 65/35 market benchmark.

Donors who wish to leave a lasting legacy at the University of Minnesota may choose to make endowed gifts to create new funds or contribute to existing funds. These funds are pooled and invested together as the UMF endowment. UMF manages the investment and spending of approximately 6,000 endowed funds, each one representing a vision for improving lives and creating a brighter tomorrow.

Asset category allocation

Additional financial information also is available online at driven.umn.edu/about-umf/financial.
How has the UMF endowment performed over the long term?
The UMF endowment has performed well over the long term, making it possible for funds to provide predictable and stable funding to support their designated programs. The chart below shows the growth of $1 invested in the endowment in 1990 compared with the Foundation’s investment goal and a 65/35 market benchmark. Since the inception of UMFIA, our portfolio return has exceeded market benchmark returns by +2.5% annually, with less downside risk.

In the long term, the UMF endowment has performed well, making it possible for funds to provide consistent and stable funding to support their designated programs. The chart below illustrates the growth of $1 invested in the endowment in 1990 compared with the Foundation's investment goal and a 65/35 market benchmark. Since the inception of UMFIA, our portfolio return has exceeded market benchmark returns by +2.5% annually, with less downside risk.

UMF performance compared to our peer group
The chart at right illustrates UMF’s performance relative to our peer group: college and university endowments with assets greater than $1 billion.

UMF’s long-term investment strategy will frequently generate one-year returns that will be in the outer quartiles—either high or low—of the distribution of peer returns. More meaningful comparisons are found over the three- to five-year periods, when this variation declines.

Spending the endowment
What is the endowment spending policy?
The UMF Board of Trustees establishes the endowment spending policy. The current spending rate is 4.5% of a fund’s trailing average market value over the previous 20 quarters (5 years). These dollars, called the fund’s “payout,” are transferred to a spending account and made available each year to support the fund’s designated program. Funds designated as quasi-endowments allow spending of up to 20% of fund value annually.

Honoring donor intent
One of UMF’s most critical responsibilities is to ensure that gifts are used in accordance with donor intent. Stringent controls are in place, and UMF staff work in partnership with the U of M units to monitor funds and optimize the utilization and impact of gifts for their designated purposes.

Endowment funds and cash gifts provided
$211 million in funding to fuel greatness at the U of M in fiscal year 2019