

# **Symposium on Corporate Responsibility & Responsible Investment: Past, Present, and Future**

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**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**

Low Memorial Library

May 7–8, 2026

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**Hosted by**

High Meadows Institute and Columbia University's Sustainable Investing Research Initiative (SIRI), in partnership with the Corporate Responsibility Initiative (CRI) at the Harvard Kennedy School



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*Corporate Responsibility Initiative*

## Introduction

Over five decades, Corporate Responsibility (CR) and Responsible Investment (RI)\* have evolved from peripheral initiatives to institutionalized fields with a global influence on corporate governance, strategy, capital allocation, disclosure, and stewardship.

Yet, at a time of political polarization, climate acceleration, geopolitical fragmentation, rising inequality, and technological disruption, the question is no longer whether the fields have matured, but whether they can drive the system-level thinking and large-scale systemic change required to transition to a more inclusive, sustainable low-carbon economy.

This symposium proceeds from this system-change hypothesis: it assumes that the next stage of progress will require a commitment to a systemic change strategy that can engage the core of the capital market system and key industry value chains and policy ecosystems.

Day 1 focuses on diagnosis and stress-testing the current CR and RI fields and strategies for change. Day 2 focuses on identifying key pathways for leverage, redesign, and a five-year strategic direction.

**\* Terminology:** In this document, *Corporate Responsibility (CR)* and *Responsible Investment (RI)* are used as inclusive terms encompassing CSR, Corporate Citizenship, Corporate Sustainability, Sustainable Finance, SRI, ESG integration, and related approaches.

## Symposium steering committee

- **William Burckart** – CEO, The Investment Integration Project (TIIP)
- **Caroline Flammer** – A. Barton Hepburn Professor of Economics, Professor of Climate and of Business, Director of the Sustainable Investing Research Initiative (SIRI), Columbia University
- **Deborah Leipziger** – Consultant and Author, The Leipziger Group
- **Steve Lydenberg** – Founder and Chairman, The Investment Integration Project (TIIP)
- **Jane Nelson** – Director, Corporate Responsibility Initiative at the Harvard Kennedy School's Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government
- **Chris Pinney** – President and CEO, High Meadows Institute
- **David Wood** – Adjunct Professor of International and Public Affairs and the Brandmeyer Fellow for Impact and Sustainable Investing, Columbia University

## Agenda Overview

### DAY 1 — Understanding the Fields, their Evolution and Current Dynamics ..... 4

|                     |                                                                                           |   |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| 9:00 – 9:30 AM      | Registration & Coffee .....                                                               | 4 |
| 9:30 – 9:45 AM      | Opening Welcome & Framing .....                                                           | 4 |
| 9:45 – 11:00 AM     | Session 1: Defining the Fields — Origins, Evolution, and Convergence .....                | 4 |
| 11:00 – 11:15 AM    | Break .....                                                                               | 4 |
| 11:15 AM – 12:30 PM | Session 2: Norm-Setting, Rule-Making & Accountability .....                               | 4 |
| 12:30 – 12:40 PM    | Book launch for <i>The Handbook of System-level Investing</i> .....                       | 5 |
| 12:40 – 1:30 PM     | Networking lunch .....                                                                    | 5 |
| 1:30 – 2:45 PM      | Session 3: Stress Testing the Fields in a Fragmenting and Disruptive Global Economy ..... | 5 |
| 2:45 – 3:00 PM      | Break .....                                                                               | 6 |
| 3:00 – 4:15 PM      | Session 4: Companies, Capital Markets, and Systemic Change .....                          | 6 |
| 4:15 – 4:30 PM      | Break .....                                                                               | 6 |
| 4:30 – 5:15 PM      | Plenary Synthesis: What Has Actually Changed? .....                                       | 6 |
| 5:15 – 6:00 PM      | Reception .....                                                                           | 6 |
| 6:00 – 9:00 PM      | Dinner & Informal Dialogue .....                                                          | 6 |

### DAY 2 — Designing the Future ..... 7

|                     |                                                                                    |   |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| 8:30 – 9:00 AM      | Coffee .....                                                                       | 7 |
| 9:00 – 10:30 AM     | Session 5: Strategic Leverage Points for the Next Phase .....                      | 7 |
| 10:30 – 10:45 AM    | Break .....                                                                        | 7 |
| 10:45 – 11:45 AM    | Session 6: Planning for the Next Five Years — What Should the Fields Do Now? ..... | 7 |
| 11:45 AM – 12:00 PM | Break .....                                                                        | 7 |
| 12:00 – 12:30 PM    | Session 7: Archive & Field-Building Legacy Session .....                           | 7 |
| 12:30 – 1:15 PM     | Closing Plenary: Synthesis, Commitments & Next Steps .....                         | 8 |
| 1:15 PM             | Lunch & Adjournment .....                                                          | 8 |

**Thursday, May 7**

**DAY 1 — Understanding the Fields, their Evolution and Current Dynamics**

**9:00 – 9:30 AM** Registration & Coffee

**9:30 – 9:45 AM** Opening Welcome & Framing

**Facilitators:** Caroline Flammer, Jane Nelson, Chris Pinney, David Wood

**Purpose:** Establish shared intellectual discipline and objectives

- Welcome from High Meadows Institute, Columbia University's Sustainable Investing Research Initiative (SIRI), and the Corporate Responsibility Initiative (CRI) at the Harvard Kennedy School
- Why this moment represents a potential paradigm inflection point
- Introduction to three guiding lenses:
  1. Historical evolution
  2. Systems context
  3. Strategic redesign

**9:45 – 11:00 AM** Session 1: Defining the Fields — Origins, Evolution, and Convergence (75 minutes)

**Facilitator:** Jane Nelson

**Discussants:** David Grayson, Steve Lydenberg

**Purpose:** Establish a shared understanding of what CR and RI set out to achieve and how they have evolved

**Illustrative Milestones:** Sullivan Principles/South Africa divestment, UN Global Compact, UN PRI, GRI, stewardship evolution

**Format:** Scene-setting (20 min) + moderated dialogue (45 min) + plenary reflection

**11:00 – 11:15 AM** Break

**11:15 AM – 12:30 PM** Session 2: Norm-Setting, Rule-Making & Accountability — Tools, Practices, and Limits (75 minutes)

**Facilitator:** David Wood

**Discussants:** Michael Lent, Sandra Waddock

**Purpose:** Assess which accountability mechanisms have genuinely shifted behavior

**Discussion Focus:**

- Coalition building & voluntary standards
- Disclosure frameworks (GRI, TCFD, ISSB, CDP)
- Stewardship & engagement (ICCR, Climate Action 100+, Engine No. 1)
- Voluntary vs. mandatory regimes

**Key Tensions:**

- Enforcement vs. signaling
- Voice vs. exit
- Greenwashing and credibility

**12:30 – 12:40 PM** Book launch for *The Handbook of System-level Investing*, with editors Jon Lukomnik and William Burckart

**12:40 – 1:30 PM** Networking lunch

**1:30 – 2:45 PM Session 3: Stress Testing the Fields in a Fragmenting and Disruptive Global Economy**  
(75 minutes)

**Facilitator:** Chris Pinney

**Discussants:** Judy Samuelson, Simon Zadek

**Purpose:** Evaluate whether historical strategies remain viable under current conditions – rather than a general environmental scan, this session will function as a structured stress test

**Three Analytical Axes:****1. Political Legitimacy**

- Anti-ESG backlash
- Polarization & populism
- Sovereignty vs. global standard-setting

**2. Market Structure**

- Capital concentration & dominance of passive funds
- Growth of private markets
- State capitalism & geopolitics

**3. Technological Disruption**

- AI-driven disruption, transparency, and modeling
- Data concentration
- Transition risk analytics

**Outcome:** Clear identification of structural constraints shaping the next phase

**2:45 – 3:00 PM** Break

**3:00 – 4:15 PM Session 4: Companies, Capital Markets, and Systemic Change** (75 minutes)

**Facilitator:** Jon Lukomnik

**Discussants:** Jake Barnett, Doug Chia, Catherine Howarth

**Purpose:** Examine how a systems lens reshapes strategy and scale

**Outcome:** Shared understanding of enterprise/portfolio/system interactions and leverage points

**4:15 – 4:30 PM** Break

**4:30 – 5:15 PM Plenary Synthesis: What Has Actually Changed?** (45 minutes)

**Facilitators:** Caroline Flammer, Jane Nelson, Chris Pinney, David Wood

**Purpose:** Integrate insights from Sessions 1–4

**Celebrating our work together**

**5:15 – 6:00 PM** Reception

**6:00 – 9:00 PM** Dinner & Informal Dialogue

**Friday, May 8**

## **DAY 2 — Designing the Future**

**8:30 – 9:00 AM** Coffee

**9:00 – 10:30 AM Session 5: Strategic Leverage Points for the Next Phase** (90 minutes)

**Facilitator:** William Burckart

**Discussants:** Jake Barnett, Sherwat Elwan Ibrahim, Mirtha Kastrapeli

**Purpose:** Pivot from diagnosis to redesign

Identify 3–5 high-leverage strategic shifts capable of materially accelerating and scaling systemic impact over the next five years

**Opening Frame (20 minutes):** From Sustainability / Responsibility 2.0 to 3.0 — What Actually Changes?

**Outcome:** Shortlist of priority leverage areas for field-level advancement

**10:30 – 10:45 AM** Break

**10:45 – 11:45 AM Session 6: Planning for the Next Five Years — What Should the Fields Do Now?** (60 minutes)

**Facilitator:** Caroline Flammer

**Discussants:** Ingrid Dyott, Cynthia Williams

**Purpose:** Translate insights into actionable, forward-looking strategies

**Working groups focus on:** Strategic leverage points identified in session 5

**Outcome:** Short, concrete strategy prototypes grounded in institutional and political reality

**11:45 AM – 12:00 PM** Break

**12:00 – 12:30 PM Session 7: Archive & Field-Building Legacy Session** (30 minutes)

**Facilitator:** Deborah Leipziger

**Discussants:** Bob Massie, Jane Nelson

**Purpose:** Introduction to the Corporate Responsibility & Responsible Investment Archive at Columbia SIRI and Archive Initiative in the UK

- Preserving the intellectual evolution of the fields
- Invitation to contribute materials and oral histories
- Positioning the Archive as infrastructure for the next paradigm phase

**12:30 – 1:15 PM Closing Plenary: Synthesis, Commitments & Next Steps** (45 minutes)

**Facilitators:** Caroline Flammer, Jane Nelson, Chris Pinney, David Wood

- Consolidation of priority strategies
- Identification of shared commitments
- Clarification of post-symposium opportunities and actions:
  - Collaborative research
  - Field coordination
  - Institutional pilots
  - Archive support

**1:15 PM** Lunch & Adjournment