

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

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
LOW MEMORIAL LIBRARY
MAY 7–8, 2026

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.

Overview

Over four 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.

Contents

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 (75 minutes) 4
- 11:00 – 11:15 AM** Break..... 5
- 11:15 AM – 12:30 PM** Session 2: Norm-Setting, Rule-Making & Accountability — Tools, Practices, and Limits (75 minutes)..... 5
- 12:30 – 1:30 PM** Networking Lunch (Hosted Tables)..... 5
- 1:30 – 2:45 PM** Session 3: Stress Testing the Fields in a Fragmenting and Disruptive Global Economy (75 minutes) 5
- 2:45 – 3:00 PM** Break..... 6
- 3:00 – 4:15 PM** Session 4: Leverage Points for Systemic Change (75 minutes)..... 6
- 4:15 – 4:30 PM** Break..... 6
- 4:30 – 5:15 PM** Plenary Synthesis: What Has Actually Changed? (45 minutes) 6
- Celebrating our work together 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 (90 minutes) 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? (60 minutes) 7
- 11:45 AM – 12:00 PM** Break 8
- 12:00 – 12:30 PM** Session 7: Archive & Field-Building Legacy Session (30 minutes)..... 8
- 12:30 – 1:15 PM** Closing Plenary: Synthesis, Commitments & Next Steps (45 minutes)..... 8
- 1:15 PM** Lunch & Adjournment 8

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

Thursday, May 7

9:00 – 9:30 AM Registration & Coffee

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

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)

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

Core Questions:

- What have the fields attempted to change?
- What worked — and why?
- Where have CR and RI converged and diverged?

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)

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 – 1:30 PM Networking Lunch (Hosted Tables)

- Suggested themes: Climate & Net Zero | Human Rights | Governance | Data & AI | Fiduciary Duty

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

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

Core Questions:

- Where has legitimacy eroded?
- Are voluntary alliances still scalable?
- Does AI enhance accountability — or amplify opacity?

Outcome:

Clear identification of structural constraints shaping the next phase

2:45 – 3:00 PM Break

3:00 – 4:15 PM Session 4: Leverage Points for Systemic Change (75 minutes)

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

Core Questions:

- What distinguishes incremental reform from systems change?
- What are the limits of firm-level and portfolio-level intervention?
- Where are the highest leverage points?

Outcome:

Shared analytical framework distinguishing:

- Firm-level ESG integration
- Market-shaping mechanisms
- Structural policy and rules redesign

4:15 – 4:30 PM Break

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

Purpose: Integrate insights from Sessions 1–4.

Core Questions:

- Where have CR and RI achieved durable impact?
- Where have they institutionalized but not transformed?
- Where are the major gaps and what tensions must carry into Day 2?

Celebrating our work together

5:15 – 6:00 PM Reception

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

DAY 2 — Designing the Future

Friday, May 8

8:30 – 9:00 AM Coffee

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

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?

Core Questions:

- What must fundamentally shift to move from incremental to systemic impact?
- Where is institutional redesign required (fiduciary duty, accounting, capital allocation)?
- How can AI function as a force multiplier for measurement and coordination?
- How can CR and RI achieve deeper structural alignment?

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)

Purpose: Translate insights into actionable, forward-looking strategies

Core questions:

- What would a credible five-year strategy for CR and RI look like?
- What must change in tools, incentives, governance, collaboration, and policy?
- What research and resources are needed to support this strategy?

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)

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)

- 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