



# Survey of Capital Market Assumptions

## 2023 Edition



Horizon Actuarial Services, LLC is proud to serve as the actuary to over 100 multiemployer defined benefit pension plans across the United States and across various industries. As actuary to these plans, we must develop assumptions regarding future investment returns on plan assets. We then use those assumptions as we determine the actuarial values of the benefits promised by these plans to their participants and beneficiaries, as well as to project plan funding and solvency levels years into the future.

At Horizon Actuarial, we are retirement and healthcare actuaries, not investment professionals. Therefore, when developing assumptions as to what returns a pension plan's assets might be expected to earn in the future, we seek input from our colleagues in the investment advisory community. Each year, as part of this survey, we ask different investment firms to provide their "capital market assumptions" – their expectations for future risk and returns for different asset classes in which pension plans commonly invest. The information gathered from this survey can help answer the common question: "Are my plan's investment return assumptions reasonable?"

There are many factors to consider when evaluating a plan's investment return assumptions, such as its asset allocation, the maturity of its participant population, and the purpose of the measurement. Any of these factors can make the expected return for one plan very different from others. Therefore, this report does not opine on the reasonableness of any one plan's investment return assumptions. Nevertheless, we hope this report will be a useful resource for trustees, actuaries, and investment professionals alike.

***Horizon Actuarial sincerely thanks the 42 investment advisors who participated in this survey.***

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Miami ■ San Diego ■ San Francisco ■ Washington, D.C.

# Survey of Capital Market Assumptions: 2023 Edition

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## Summary

Horizon Actuarial first conducted this survey in 2010, and it included 8 investment advisors. In 2012, we first published a report on the survey results, which included 17 advisors. The survey has expanded considerably in recent years; this 2023 edition of the survey includes assumptions from 42 different investment firms.

Readers of this survey are aware that expected returns have declined for all but a few asset classes from 2016 through 2022. The steepest declines were for fixed income investments such as US corporate bonds and Treasuries, where return expectations fell more than 100 basis points from 2019 to 2021. Due to recent increases in interest rates and lower equity valuations at the end of 2022, we see a reversal of this trend, with markedly higher expectations across asset classes in 2023. While overall expectations still aren't as high as they were in 2016, they are at their highest level since 2018.

As we have seen in prior surveys, expected returns are lower over the short term than over the long term, though the difference is the smallest it has been since we first conducted the survey. This trend is apparent when we focus on the 27 advisors who provided assumptions for both the short term (up to 10 years) and long term (20 years or more).

For less mature ongoing pension plans without solvency issues, we believe a horizon of 20 years or more is appropriate for evaluating the reasonableness of the long-term investment return assumption. A shorter horizon, such as 10 years, may be more appropriate for evaluating the return assumption for a plan that is more mature or has solvency issues. Even for plans with long-term investment horizons, it is important to understand the potential impact of lower expected returns over the short term. Therefore, this survey shows return expectations over horizons of both 10 years and 20 years.

For illustration, this report also constructs an asset allocation for a hypothetical multiemployer pension plan and uses the results from the survey to develop a range of reasonably expected returns for the plan. The expected returns for this 2023 edition were **126 basis points higher over a 10-year horizon than they were last year**, and 94 basis points higher than they were in 2018. **Over a 20-year horizon, expected returns are 88 basis points higher than last year**, and 5 basis points higher than they were five years ago in the 2018 edition of the survey.

If you have questions about how the results of this survey relate to your multiemployer plan, please contact your consultant at Horizon Actuarial or visit the "contact us" page on our website, [www.horizonactuarial.com](http://www.horizonactuarial.com). For questions about the survey itself, please contact Ben Ablin at [ben.ablin@horizonactuarial.com](mailto:ben.ablin@horizonactuarial.com).

*Horizon Actuarial Services, LLC is an independent consulting firm specializing in providing actuarial and consulting services to multiemployer benefit plans. Horizon Actuarial does not provide investment, legal, or tax advice. Please consult with your investment advisor, legal counsel, or tax advisor for information specific to your plan's investment, legal, or tax implications.*

# Survey of Capital Market Assumptions: 2023 Edition

## Survey Participants

Exhibit 1 below lists the 42 investment advisors whose capital market assumptions are included in the 2023 survey. This report does not attribute specific assumptions to individual firms, which is a precondition of the survey.

Originally, this survey was exclusive to the multiemployer plan community; it included assumptions only from investment advisors to multiemployer pension plans. The survey has expanded over the years, and it now includes assumptions from investment advisors outside of the multiemployer plan community.

A complete listing of the firms participating in the survey is provided below.

### Exhibit 1

2023 Survey Participants	
<i>AJ Gallagher</i>	<i>Merrill</i>
<i>Alan Biller</i>	<i>Milliman</i>
<i>AndCo Consulting</i>	<i>Morgan Stanley</i>
<i>Aon</i>	<i>NEPC</i>
<i>The Atlanta Consulting Group</i>	<i>PFM Asset Management, LLC</i>
<i>Bank of New York Mellon*</i>	<i>PIMCO</i>
<i>BlackRock*</i>	<i>Principal</i>
<i>Buck</i>	<i>Research Affiliates, LLC*</i>
<i>Callan Associates</i>	<i>Royal Bank of Canada</i>
<i>Cambridge Associates</i>	<i>RVK</i>
<i>CapTrust</i>	<i>Segal Marco Advisors</i>
<i>Envestnet</i>	<i>SEI</i>
<i>Goldman Sachs Asset Management</i>	<i>Sellwood Consulting</i>
<i>Graystone Consulting</i>	<i>Sterling Capital Management, LLC</i>
<i>Invesco*</i>	<i>Truist Investment Advisory</i>
<i>Investment Performance Services, LLC (IPS)</i>	<i>UBS</i>
<i>Janney Montgomery Scott, LLC</i>	<i>The Vanguard Group</i>
<i>J.P. Morgan Asset Management*</i>	<i>Verus</i>
<i>Marquette Associates</i>	<i>Voya Investment Management*</i>
<i>Meketa Investment Group</i>	<i>Willis Towers Watson</i>
<i>Mercer</i>	<i>Wilshire</i>

\*Assumptions obtained from published white paper.

## Investment Horizons

When evaluating the expected return assumption for an active, ongoing multiemployer pension plan, actuaries usually consider investment returns over a long-term investment horizon of 20 years or more. A shorter time horizon, say over the next 10 years, may be more appropriate when evaluating the return assumption for a mature plan, a plan that has high negative cash flows, or a plan that is projected to become insolvent.

It is also important to understand the sensitivity of plan funding to changes in future investment returns. For example, the actuary for an active, ongoing pension plan will typically set the plan's investment return assumption based on expectations over a long-term horizon. However, evaluating the sensitivity of funding results to short-term investment returns that are expected to be higher or lower than the long-term assumption also plays an integral role in the decision-making process.

Advisors provided their most recent capital market assumptions: expected returns for different asset classes, standard deviations (i.e., volatilities) for those expected returns, and a correlation matrix. The advisors also indicated the investment horizon(s) to which their assumptions apply. If the advisor develops separate assumptions for different time horizons, they provided multiple sets of assumptions, one for each time horizon.

In the 2023 edition of the survey, 15 advisors provided one set of assumptions, of which all 15 specified a time horizon of 10 years. The remaining 27 advisors provided assumptions over both shorter-term (5 to 10 years) and longer-term (20 years or more) horizons. Note that two of the advisors rely on the same assumptions as other survey participants. Each assumption set was only counted once, even if it was provided by more than one advisor. Each unique assumption set was given equal weight in the survey.

Exhibit 2 below summarizes the time horizons specified by each advisor.

### Exhibit 2

Investment Time Horizons	
<b>Time Horizon</b>	<b>Total</b>
10 Years	15
<u>Both Short- and Long-Term</u>	<u>27</u>
Total	42

# Survey of Capital Market Assumptions: 2023 Edition

## Short-Term vs. Long-Term

As noted in the previous section, survey participants provided expected returns over different time horizons. Given current market conditions, many investment advisors may expect returns for certain asset classes to be different in the short term versus over the long term.

For comparability, this survey groups expected returns into two time horizons: 10 years and 20 years. As pension plan actuaries, we often refer to the 10-year expected returns as “short-term” and the 20-year expected returns as “long-term.” Note, however, that many investment firms consider 10-year expectations to be “long-term.”

When comparing the expected returns for the 27 advisors who provided both short-term and long-term assumptions,<sup>1</sup> we see some interesting differences. See Exhibit 3 below. The expected returns shown below are annualized (geometric) over the indicated time horizons.

### Exhibit 3

Average Expected Returns: Short-Term vs. Long-Term			
<i>Subset of 27 Survey Respondents</i>			
Asset Class	10-Year Horizon	20-Year Horizon	Difference
US Equity - Large Cap	6.96%	7.37%	0.41%
US Equity - Small/Mid Cap	7.46%	7.75%	0.29%
Non-US Equity - Developed	7.73%	7.78%	0.05%
Non-US Equity - Emerging	8.45%	8.59%	0.14%
US Corporate Bonds - Core	4.71%	4.76%	0.05%
US Corporate Bonds - Long Dur.	4.84%	5.00%	0.15%
US Corporate Bonds - High Yield	6.63%	6.54%	-0.09%
Non-US Debt - Developed	3.39%	3.52%	0.13%
Non-US Debt - Emerging	6.32%	6.40%	0.08%
US Treasuries (Cash Equivalents)	3.54%	3.23%	-0.32%
TIPS (Inflation-Protected)	4.11%	4.08%	-0.03%
Real Estate	5.68%	6.25%	0.57%
Hedge Funds	6.24%	6.18%	-0.06%
Commodities	5.05%	4.90%	-0.15%
Infrastructure	6.88%	7.06%	0.18%
Private Equity	9.67%	10.13%	0.45%
Private Debt	8.39%	8.24%	-0.15%
Inflation	2.52%	2.46%	-0.06%

*The 10-year and 20-year returns shown above are the averages for the 27 advisors who provided both short-term and long-term assumptions. Expected returns are annualized (geometric).*

The consensus among these 27 advisors was that returns for most asset classes are expected to be lower in the short term compared to the long term. In general, the

difference between long-term and short-term returns is more pronounced for domestic equity investments. The differences are also relatively large for certain alternative investments such as private equity and real estate.

As noted earlier, the results shown in Exhibit 3 are based on a subset of 27 advisors. If we include all 42 survey advisors, the results do not change dramatically for most asset classes. See Exhibit 4 below.

### Exhibit 4

Average Expected Returns: Short-Term vs. Long-Term			
<i>All Survey Respondents</i>			
Asset Class	10-Year Horizon	20-Year Horizon	Difference
US Equity - Large Cap	6.90%	7.37%	0.48%
US Equity - Small/Mid Cap	7.38%	7.75%	0.38%
Non-US Equity - Developed	7.49%	7.78%	0.29%
Non-US Equity - Emerging	8.21%	8.59%	0.38%
US Corporate Bonds - Core	4.71%	4.76%	0.05%
US Corporate Bonds - Long Dur.	4.80%	5.00%	0.20%
US Corporate Bonds - High Yield	6.43%	6.54%	0.11%
Non-US Debt - Developed	3.42%	3.52%	0.10%
Non-US Debt - Emerging	6.29%	6.40%	0.11%
US Treasuries (Cash Equivalents)	3.38%	3.23%	-0.16%
TIPS (Inflation-Protected)	4.07%	4.08%	0.01%
Real Estate	5.95%	6.25%	0.30%
Hedge Funds	5.96%	6.18%	0.22%
Commodities	4.96%	4.90%	-0.05%
Infrastructure	7.00%	7.06%	0.06%
Private Equity	9.46%	10.13%	0.66%
Private Debt	8.16%	8.24%	0.08%
Inflation	2.55%	2.46%	-0.09%

*10-year horizon results include all 42 survey respondents. 20-year horizon results include a subset of 27 survey respondents. Expected returns are annualized (geometric).*

The 10-year expected returns shown above include assumptions from all 42 advisors, while the 20-year expected returns include assumptions from only the 27 advisors who provided longer-term assumptions.

The differences between short- and long-term expectations are the smallest they have been since we first conducted this survey using two separate time horizons. Nonetheless, it remains important for actuaries to illustrate the effects of near-term underperformance on their clients’ pension funds. Furthermore, it may be appropriate for actuaries to attribute more weight to nearer term expectations when setting the investment return assumption for mature plans whose liabilities have a shorter duration.

<sup>1</sup> In cases where an advisor indicated a time horizon shorter than 10 years, the shorter-term expected returns were combined with the longer-term expected returns to achieve a 10-year horizon. Similarly, if an advisor indicated a time horizon longer than 20 years, the longer-term expected returns were combined with the shorter-term expected returns to achieve a 20-year horizon.

# Survey of Capital Market Assumptions: 2023 Edition

## Differing Opinions

Exhibit 5 below shows the distribution of expected returns and standard deviations (i.e., volatilities) for each asset class in the survey, as provided by the 42 individual advisors in the survey. The expected returns shown are geometric.

Note that the exhibit below focuses on a 10-year horizon in order to include assumptions from all 42 advisors. See Exhibits 17 and 18 in the appendix to this report for a more detailed look at the distribution of expected returns and standard deviations over both 10- and 20-year horizons. The ranges of expected returns by asset class can be found in the appendix as Exhibits 19 and 20.

A summary of the average survey assumptions can be found in the appendix to this report as Exhibit 16. This summary includes expected returns, standard deviations, and a correlation matrix.

The exhibit below shows that there are significant differences in expected returns and standard deviations among investment advisors. As the saying goes, “reasonable people may differ.”

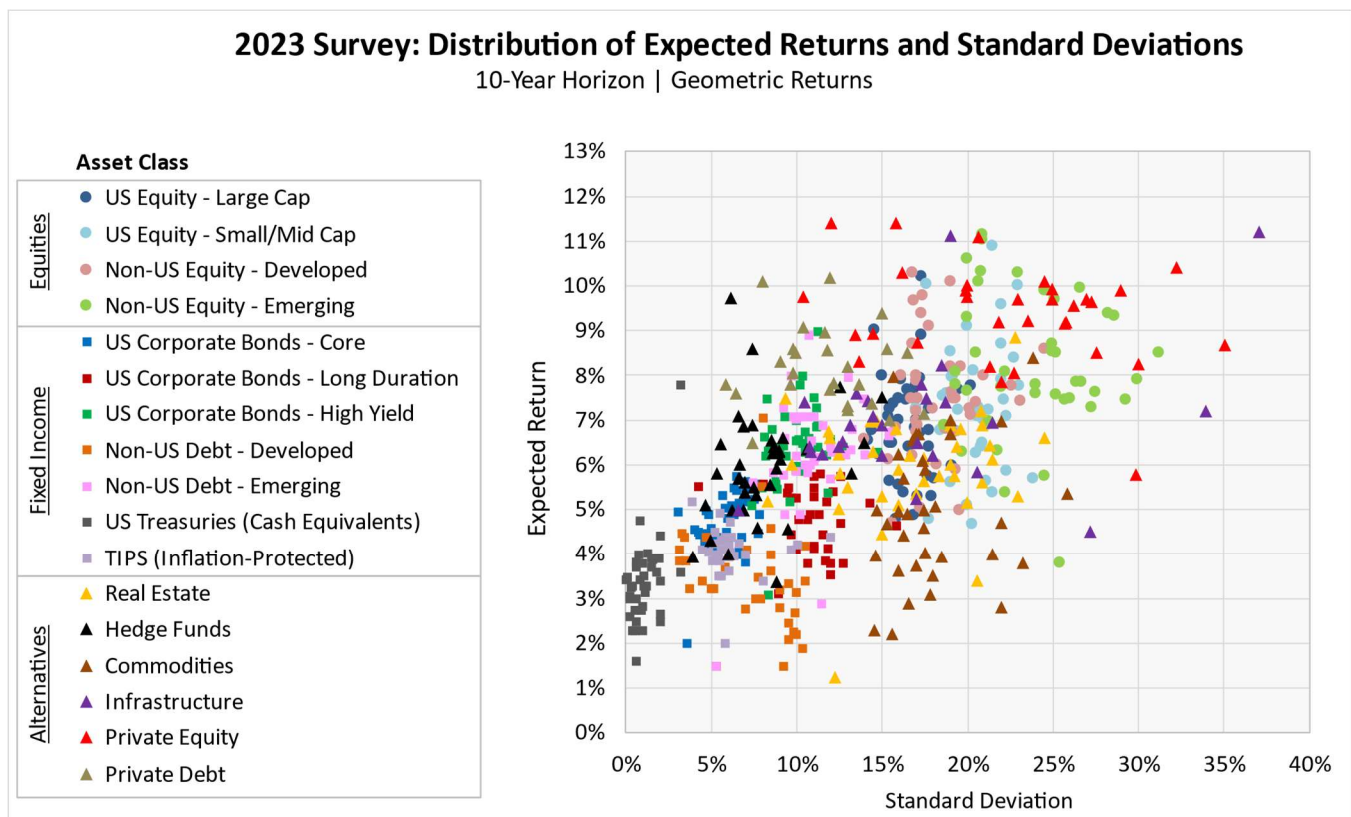
The differences in assumptions are more pronounced for alternative investments such as real estate, hedge funds, and private equity. A contributing factor may be differences in the underlying strategies different advisors apply to these alternative investments.

To contrast, the differences in expected returns and volatilities are smaller for more traditional investments, such as US equity and US fixed income.

Another reason for the significant differences among investment advisors may be the effective date of the assumptions. Ideally, this survey would compile and compare assumptions that all have the same effective date. However, this is not feasible when aggregating results from 42 advisors who update their assumptions on different schedules.

The vast majority of advisors specified effective dates on or around January 1, 2023. However, a few specified effective dates as early as October 1, 2022 and a few specified dates as late as March 31, 2023.

Exhibit 5





# Survey of Capital Market Assumptions: 2023 Edition

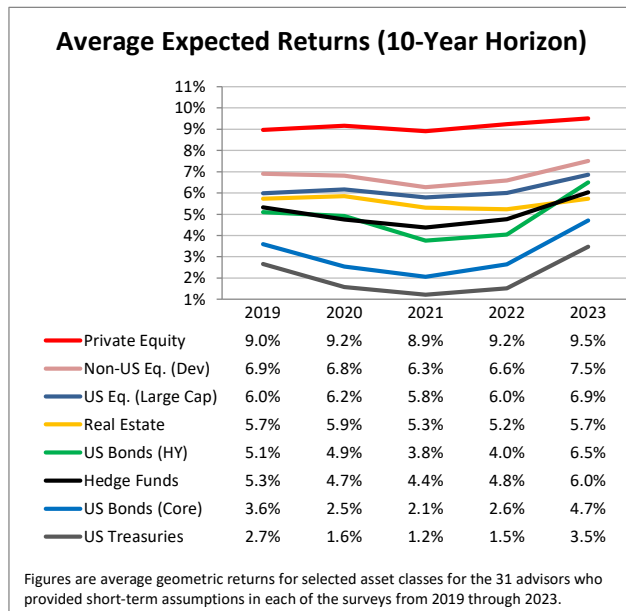
## Changing Outlooks: 2019 to 2023

In recent years, there has been much discussion about whether it is reasonable to expect that future investment returns will be as high as they have been historically. Citing various reasons such as increased equity prices, tightening credit spreads, and the persistence of historically low interest rates, many advisors lowered their expectations gradually from year-to-year before reducing them considerably from 2019 to 2021.

With interest rates on the rise and lower equity valuations at the end of 2022, we have seen a sharp reversal of this trend, with markedly higher expectations across asset classes in 2023.

Exhibit 6 below shows average expected returns over a 10-year horizon for selected asset classes each year from 2019 to 2023. For consistency, this exhibit includes only the 31 advisors who provided short-term assumptions in each of these years.

**Exhibit 6**



For this subset of advisors, average expected returns over a 10-year horizon declined for most asset classes from 2019 to 2021, then increased slightly in 2022 before increasing dramatically in 2023. The sharpest increases in 2023 were for fixed income classes, such as US Treasuries, core US bonds, and high-yield US bonds.

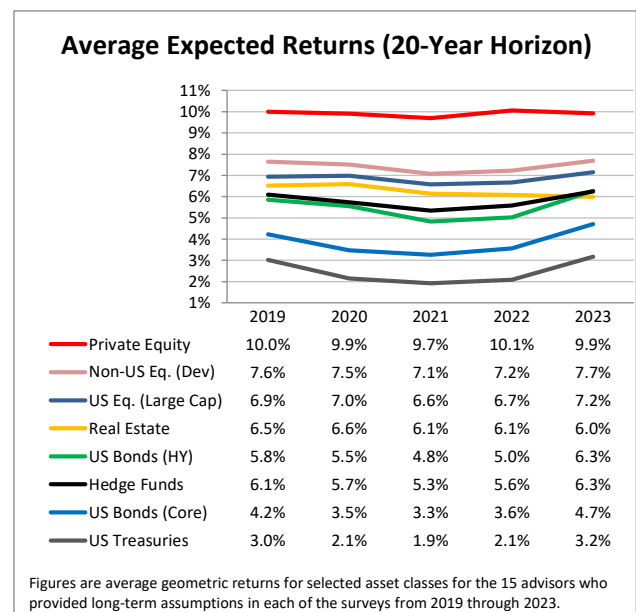
Expectations for US large cap equities also increased sharply from 2022 to 2023, with an increase of 90 basis points from 6.0% to 6.9%. Increases for other classes were generally smaller.

Expectations for all but one of the asset classes shown (real estate) have increased over the five-year period shown.

Exhibit 7 below shows how average expected returns have changed for the same asset classes for a subset of 15 advisors who provided assumptions each year from 2019 to 2023 over a 20-year horizon.

Note that the expected returns shown in Exhibits 6 and 7 are not directly comparable with those in other sections or previous surveys because we include only a subset of advisors who participated in each of the last 5 years.

**Exhibit 7**



Although the expected returns are generally higher over a 20-year horizon than a 10-year horizon, the trends over the 5-year period are very similar. Namely, steep declines in return expectations for fixed income investments from 2019 to 2021, followed by a small rebound in 2022 and a dramatic increase in 2023.

Just as the sharpest declines from 2019 to 2021 were for fixed income classes such as core US bonds, high-yield US bonds, and US Treasuries, the largest increases from 2022 to 2023 were for these same asset classes.

While there were increases in expectations over a 20-year horizon for most of the asset classes shown from 2019 to 2023, expectations for a few asset classes experienced declines in expectations over this period. The largest decline was for real estate (from 6.5% to 6.0%). There was also a modest decline for private equity (from 10.0% to 9.9%).

# Survey of Capital Market Assumptions: 2023 Edition

## Evaluating the Return Assumption

Multiemployer pension plans are usually invested in a well-diversified mix of stocks, bonds, real estate, and alternative investments structured to meet the goals of the Trustees. This typically involves maximizing returns over the long term while minimizing return volatility.

The actuary of a multiemployer pension plan must consider the plan's asset allocation and, based on expectations of future returns, develop an assumption for what plan assets are projected to earn over the long term. This assumption is then used (along with others) to determine the actuarial present value of the benefits promised by the plan to its participants and beneficiaries.

The actuary will often seek input on future return expectations from the plan's investment advisor in developing the plan's investment return assumption. However, as noted earlier, different investment advisors often have widely differing opinions on what future returns will be. Therefore, it can be beneficial to keep in mind other advisors' expectations when setting the investment return assumption.

In the following exhibits, we will evaluate the investment return assumption for a hypothetical multiemployer pension plan. Exhibit 8 below shows the asset allocation for this hypothetical plan. The asset allocations are arbitrary, except for the fact that we made sure to include at least a small allocation to every asset class in the survey.

### Exhibit 8

Asset Class - Hypothetical Plan	Weight
US Equity - Large Cap	20.0%
US Equity - Small/Mid Cap	10.0%
Non-US Equity - Developed	7.5%
Non-US Equity - Emerging	5.0%
US Corporate Bonds - Core	7.5%
US Corporate Bonds - Long Duration	2.5%
US Corporate Bonds - High Yield	5.0%
Non-US Debt - Developed	5.0%
Non-US Debt - Emerging	2.5%
US Treasuries (Cash Equivalents)	5.0%
TIPS (Inflation-Protected)	5.0%
Real Estate	7.5%
Hedge Funds	5.0%
Commodities	2.5%
Infrastructure	2.5%
Private Equity	5.0%
Private Debt	2.5%
<b>TOTAL PORTFOLIO</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Exhibit 9 shows expected annualized (geometric) returns for the hypothetical plan over a 10-year horizon. These results may be appropriate for modeling sensitivities of future funding results to short-term investment returns, or for evaluating the return assumption for a plan with severely negative cash flows or solvency issues.

### Exhibit 9

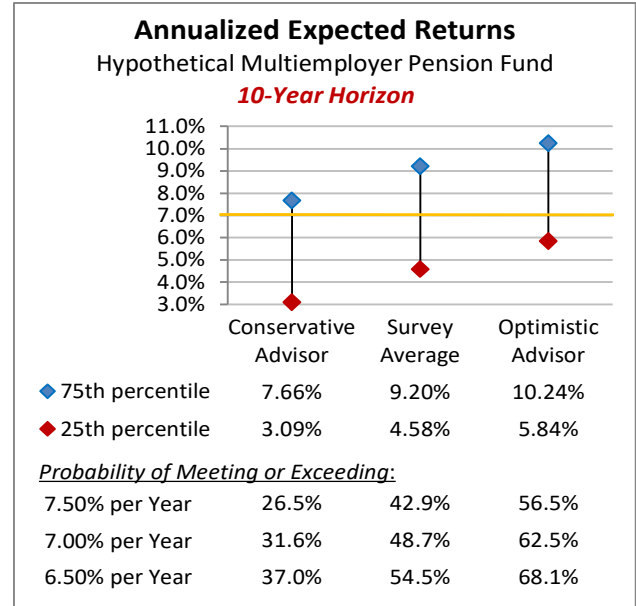
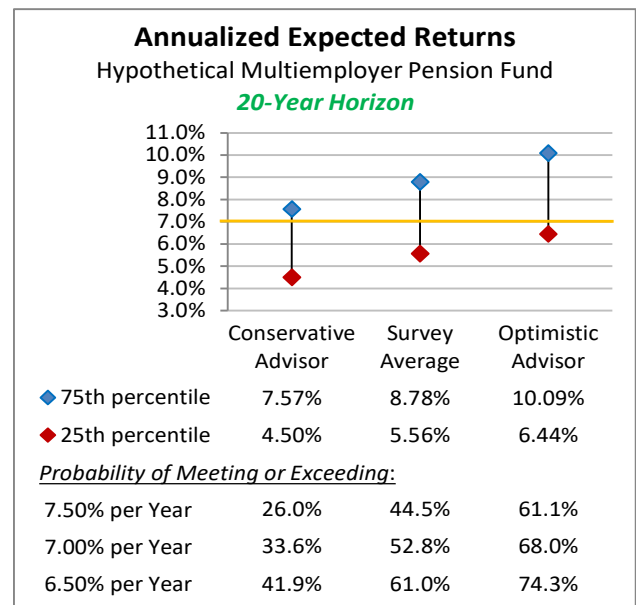


Exhibit 10 shows expected annualized (geometric) returns for the hypothetical plan over a 20-year horizon based on assumptions from the 27 advisors who provided longer-term assumptions. These results may be more appropriate for evaluating the return assumption for a less mature plan with no projected solvency issues.

### Exhibit 10



# Survey of Capital Market Assumptions: 2023 Edition

## **Evaluating the Return Assumption (cont.)**

It is important to keep in mind that the expected returns shown in Exhibits 9 and 10 apply only to the hypothetical asset allocation shown in Exhibit 8. The expected returns will be different – perhaps significantly – for different asset allocations. The following are points to consider when reviewing the results in Exhibits 9 and 10:

**Range of Reasonable Assumptions:** When setting the investment return assumption for pension valuations, actuaries traditionally constructed a range of reasonable assumptions and then selected a best-estimate point within that range. Actuaries would often consider the reasonable range to be the middle 50 percent of possible results, bounded by the 25<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> percentiles.

The applicable actuarial standards of practice were updated in 2013, and the updated standards de-emphasize use of the reasonable range when setting the investment return assumption. Nevertheless, considering this range remains instructive; it may be difficult for an actuary to justify an assumption outside of this range.

Based on the average assumptions in this 2023 survey, the middle 50 percent range for this hypothetical pension plan is very wide: 5.56% to 8.78% over the next 20 years. Note that the range is even wider for a 10-year horizon: 4.58% to 9.20%. This is due to the fact that, while returns may be volatile from one year to the next, deviations will be lower when returns are annualized (in other words, smoothed out) over longer horizons.

**Probability of Meeting/Exceeding the Benchmark:** For example, say that the actuary for this hypothetical pension plan expects its investment returns to be 7.00% per year, represented by the gold lines in Exhibits 9 and 10. Based on the average assumptions in this 2023 survey, there is a 52.8% probability the plan will meet or beat its 7.00% benchmark on an annualized basis over a 20-year period. The probability is lower, 48.7%, that the plan will meet or beat its benchmark over the next 10 years.

Also note that over a 20-year period, the probability that the annualized investment return will exceed 7.50% (arbitrarily, 50 basis points above the benchmark return) is 44.5%. The probability that the annualized return will exceed 6.50% (50 basis points below the benchmark) is 61.0%. These probabilities are a bit lower when focusing on a 10-year horizon rather than a 20-year horizon.

**Purpose of the Measurement:** It is important to note that this survey focuses on the investment return assumption, which may (or may not) be the same as the assumption used to discount a plan's projected benefit payments to measure its liabilities. The applicable standards of practice emphasize that the actuary should consider the purpose of the measurement (e.g., contribution budgeting,

defeasance or settlement, market measurements, pricing) as a primary factor in choosing a discount rate.

**Optimistic and Conservative Assumptions:** As previously noted, different investment advisors may have widely varying future capital market expectations. Therefore, it may also be interesting to consider the range of expected returns based on the assumptions provided by the most conservative and most optimistic advisors in the survey.

For this hypothetical asset allocation, the assumptions from the most conservative advisor indicate that the probability of beating the 7.00% benchmark assumption over the next 20 years is 33.6%. Using assumptions from the most optimistic advisor results in a probability of 68.0%. Again, reasonable people may differ.

**Limitations:** The following are some important limiting factors to keep in mind when reviewing these results.

- The asset classes in this survey do not always align perfectly with the asset classes provided by the investment advisors. Adjustments were made to standardize the different asset classes provided.
- Many of the advisors develop their future assumptions based on investment horizons of no more than 10 years, and returns are generally expected to be lower in the short term. The typical multiemployer pension plan will have an investment horizon that is much longer than 10 years.
- The return expectations are generally based on market returns. In other words, they do not reflect any additional returns that may be earned due to active asset managers outperforming the market ("alpha").
- The return expectations do not adjust for plan size. Specifically, they do not take into account the fact that certain investment opportunities are more readily available to larger plans, as well as the fact that larger plans may often receive more favorable investment fee arrangements than smaller plans.
- The ranges of expected annualized returns were constructed using basic, often simplified, formulas and methodologies. More sophisticated investment models – which may consider various economic scenarios, non-normal distributions, etc. – could produce significantly different results.

**Use of the Survey:** This survey is not intended to be a substitute for the expectations of individual portfolio managers, advisors, or actuaries performing their own independent analyses. The actuarial standards of practice provide for various methods of selecting and supporting the investment return assumption. This survey is intended to be used in conjunction with these methods, with appropriate weighting of various resources based on the plan actuary's professional judgment.



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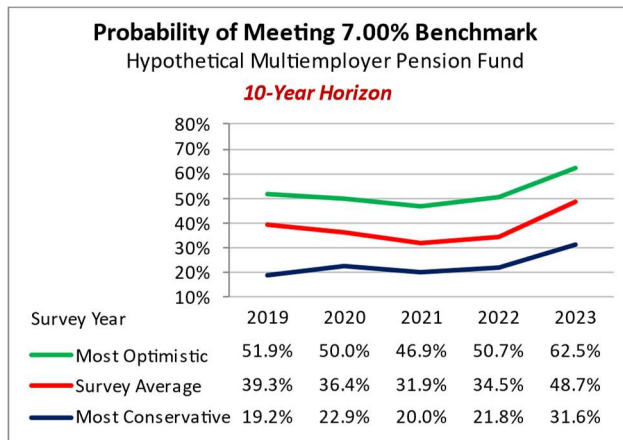
## Comparison with Prior Surveys

Exhibits 6 and 7 showed how expected returns for certain asset classes have changed over the past few years. Similarly, Exhibits 11 and 12 below show how return expectations for the hypothetical multiemployer pension plan whose asset allocation is shown in Exhibit 8 have changed from 2019 to 2023.

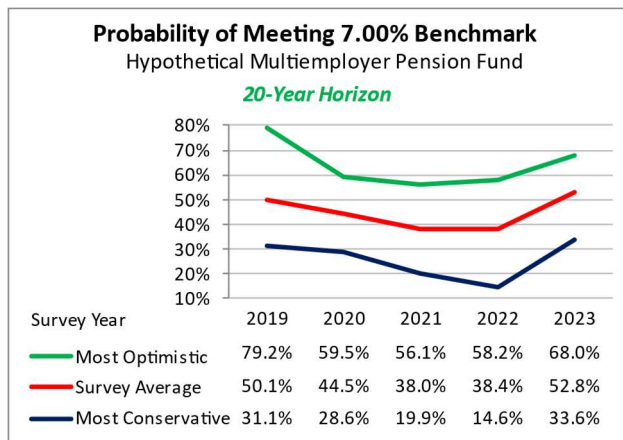
Both exhibits show the probabilities that the hypothetical pension plan will meet or exceed its 7.00% benchmark return on an annualized basis over the given time horizon. Exhibit 11 focuses on expected returns over a 10-year period and Exhibit 12 focuses on expected returns over a 20-year period. Probabilities are shown for the survey average for each year from 2019 through 2023. For comparison, probabilities are also shown for the most conservative and optimistic advisors in each survey.

See Exhibit 14 in the appendix for a more complete range of expected returns over a 20-year horizon for each survey from 2014 through 2023.

### Exhibit 11



### Exhibit 12



As shown in Exhibit 11, the probability that this hypothetical pension plan would meet or beat a benchmark return of 7.00% over a 10-year horizon stayed relatively flat from 2019 to 2022 and increased sharply in 2023. Exhibit 12 shows that the probability this hypothetical pension plan would meet or beat a benchmark return of 7.00% over a 20-year horizon declined from 2019 to 2022 before rebounding to 2019 levels in 2023.

For example:

- Based on the average assumptions from the 2023 survey, the probability of this hypothetical plan meeting or exceeding an annualized return of 7.00% over the next 10 years is 48.7%. The probability was considerably lower (39.3%) five years ago when the 2019 survey was conducted.
- Based on the average assumptions from the 2023 survey, the probability of this hypothetical plan meeting or exceeding an annualized return of 7.00% over the next 20 years is 52.8%. This represents a sharp increase from last year when the probability was 38.4%, and a modest increase from 2019 when the probability was 50.1%. The increase from 2022 to 2023 was driven by increases in expectations across asset classes, with fixed income expectations rising the most.

Other points of note when comparing the results from the 2023 survey to those from prior years:

- The results for the most conservative advisor over a 10-year horizon hovered around 20.0% from 2019 to 2022 before increasing to 31.6% in 2023. Over a 20-year horizon, the results for the most conservative advisor reached a low of 14.6% in 2022, before rebounding to 33.6% in 2023. In other words, the most conservative advisor in 2022 projected about a 1 in 7 chance of meeting the 7.00% benchmark over a 20-year horizon while the most conservative advisor in 2023 projects a mere 1 in 3 chance of meeting the same benchmark return.
- The results for the most optimistic advisor over a 10-year horizon have risen to 62.5% in 2023. Over a 20-year horizon, the results for the most optimistic advisor are even higher at 68.0% or better than a 2 in 3 chance of meeting the 7.00% benchmark.
- Note that the most conservative and most optimistic advisors are not necessarily the same from year to year or for different time horizons.

# Survey of Capital Market Assumptions: 2023 Edition

## **Glossary**

The following are basic definitions of some of the investment terminology used in this report.

### Expected Return

The *expected return* is the amount, as a percentage of assets, that an investment is expected to earn over a period of time. Expected returns in this survey are generally market returns that do not reflect value added or fees due to active management. Returns for asset classes where passive investments are not available (e.g., hedge funds and private equity) are generally net of fees.

### Arithmetic vs. Geometric Returns

An *arithmetic* return is the average return in any one year. A *geometric* return is the annualized return over a multi-year period. In general, it is more appropriate to focus on geometric returns when evaluating expected returns over multi-year horizons. However, arithmetic returns are also important. For example, the expected return of a portfolio is calculated as the weighted average of arithmetic returns, not geometric returns.

This survey focuses on geometric returns. Many advisors provide both arithmetic and geometric expected returns. For advisors who provided expected returns only on an arithmetic basis, we converted them to geometric returns for consistency. The following formula was used to make this conversion.

$$E[R_G] = ((1 + E[R_A])^2 - \text{VAR}[R])^{1/2} - 1$$

In this formula,  $E[R_G]$  is the expected geometric return,  $E[R_A]$  is the expected arithmetic return, and  $\text{VAR}[R]$  is the variance of the expected annual (arithmetic) return.

### Standard Deviation

The *standard deviation* is a measure of the expected volatility in the returns. Generally, the standard deviation expresses how much returns may vary in any one year. Assuming that returns are “normally distributed,” there is about a 68% probability that the actual return for a given year will fall within one standard deviation (higher or lower) of the expected return. There is about a 95% probability that the actual return will fall within two standard deviations of the expected return.

### Correlation

The degree to which the returns for two different asset classes move in tandem with one another is their *correlation*. For example, if two asset classes are perfectly correlated, their correlation coefficient will be 1.00; in other words, if one asset class has a return of X% in a given market environment, then the other asset class is expected to also have a return of X%. A portfolio becomes better diversified as its asset classes have lower (or even negative) correlations with each other.

## **Methodology**

The following is a high-level description of the methodology used in compiling the survey results.

### Standardized Asset Classes

Not all investment advisors use the same asset classes when developing their capital market assumptions. Some are very specific (more asset classes), while others keep things relatively simple (fewer asset classes).

We exercised judgment in classifying each advisor’s capital market assumptions into a standard set of asset classes. In the event that an advisor did not provide assumptions for a given asset class, the average assumptions from the other advisors was used when developing expected returns for that advisor.

### Investment Horizons

This survey considers “short-term” expected returns to apply to a 10-year investment horizon, and “long-term” expected returns to apply to a 20-year horizon.

In this 2023 edition of the survey, 15 of the 42 advisors provided only short-term assumptions, indicating a horizon of no more than 10 years. Included in this group is one advisor who provided assumptions over a horizon of seven years.

All 27 advisors who provided long-term assumptions over horizons of 20 years or more also provided short-term assumptions. In cases where such an advisor indicated a horizon shorter than 10 years, the shorter-term expected returns were combined with the longer-term expected returns to achieve a 10-year horizon. If an advisor indicated a time horizon longer than 20 years, the longer-term expected returns were combined with the shorter-term expected returns to achieve a 20-year horizon.

### No Adjustment for Alpha

No adjustment was made to reflect the possible value added by an active investment manager outperforming market returns (earning “alpha”).

### Normally-Distributed Returns

This survey assumes that investment returns will be normally distributed according to the capital market assumptions provided. The survey also assumes that the investment return in one year does not affect the investment return in the following year.

### Equal Weighting

Each unique assumption set was given equal weight in developing the average assumptions for the survey, regardless of factors such as total assets under advisement, research methodology, etc.

## Exhibit 13

The following exhibit evaluates the investment return assumption for a hypothetical multiemployer pension plan. It reflects the same hypothetical asset allocation as shown in Exhibit 8, and it provides more detail than Exhibits 9 and 10. Note that the most conservative and optimistic advisors for the 10-year horizon are not necessarily the same as the most conservative and optimistic advisors for the 20-year horizon. This hypothetical pension plan has a benchmark return of 7.00% per year, which is indicated by the gold line in the exhibit below.

### Hypothetical Multiemployer Plan 2023 Survey of Capital Market Assumptions

Asset Class	Portfolio Weight	Average Survey Assumptions		
		10-Year Horizon	20-Year Horizon	Standard Deviation
US Equity - Large Cap	20.0%	6.90%	7.37%	16.64%
US Equity - Small/Mid Cap	10.0%	7.38%	7.75%	20.51%
Non-US Equity - Developed	7.5%	7.49%	7.78%	18.26%
Non-US Equity - Emerging	5.0%	8.21%	8.59%	23.87%
US Corporate Bonds - Core	7.5%	4.71%	4.76%	5.85%
US Corporate Bonds - Long Duration	2.5%	4.80%	5.00%	10.91%
US Corporate Bonds - High Yield	5.0%	6.43%	6.54%	10.01%
Non-US Debt - Developed	5.0%	3.42%	3.52%	7.31%
Non-US Debt - Emerging	2.5%	6.29%	6.40%	10.93%
US Treasuries (Cash Equivalents)	5.0%	3.38%	3.23%	1.09%
TIPS (Inflation-Protected)	5.0%	4.07%	4.08%	6.17%
Real Estate	7.5%	5.95%	6.25%	16.72%
Hedge Funds	5.0%	5.96%	6.18%	8.06%
Commodities	2.5%	4.96%	4.90%	18.02%
Infrastructure	2.5%	7.00%	7.06%	17.10%
Private Equity	5.0%	9.46%	10.13%	22.57%
Private Debt	2.5%	8.16%	8.24%	11.73%
Inflation	N/A	2.55%	2.46%	1.90%
<b>TOTAL PORTFOLIO</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<i>Expected returns are geometric.</i>		

#### Considerations and Limitations

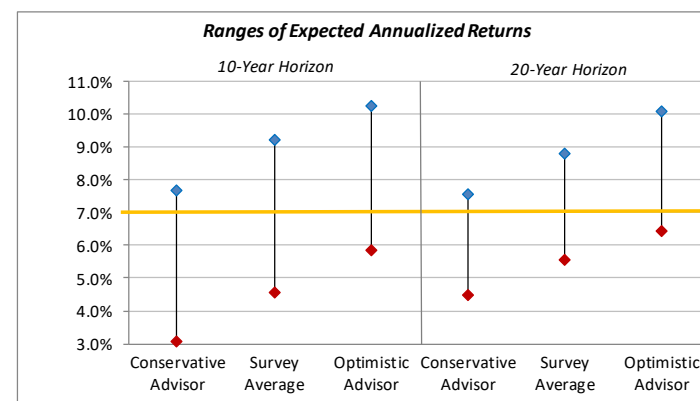
- Allocations may be approximated if certain asset classes are not included in the survey.
- Many investment advisors provided only shorter-term assumptions (10 years or less).
- Assumptions are generally based on indexed returns and do not reflect anticipated alpha.
- Assumptions do not reflect investment opportunities or fee considerations available to larger funds.

SOURCE: Horizon Actuarial 2023 Survey of Capital Market Assumptions

Expected returns over a 10-year horizon include all 42 survey participants.

Expected returns over a 20-year horizon are based a subset of 27 survey participants who provided long-term assumptions.

	10-Year Horizon			20-Year Horizon		
	Conservative Advisor	Survey Average	Optimistic Advisor	Conservative Advisor	Survey Average	Optimistic Advisor
<b>Expected Returns</b>						
Average Annual Return (Arithmetic)	5.92%	7.44%	8.53%	6.52%	7.70%	8.94%
Annualized Return (Geometric)	5.37%	6.89%	8.04%	6.03%	7.17%	8.27%
Annual Volatility (Standard Deviation)	10.73%	10.84%	10.31%	10.18%	10.70%	12.09%
<b>Range of Expected Annualized Returns</b>						
◆ 75th Percentile	7.66%	9.20%	10.24%	7.57%	8.78%	10.09%
◆ 25th Percentile	3.09%	4.58%	5.84%	4.50%	5.56%	6.44%
<b>Probabilities of Exceeding Certain Returns</b>						
7.50% per Year, Annualized	26.5%	42.9%	56.5%	26.0%	44.5%	61.1%
7.00% per Year, Annualized	31.6%	48.7%	62.5%	33.6%	52.8%	68.0%
6.50% per Year, Annualized	37.0%	54.5%	68.1%	41.9%	61.0%	74.3%

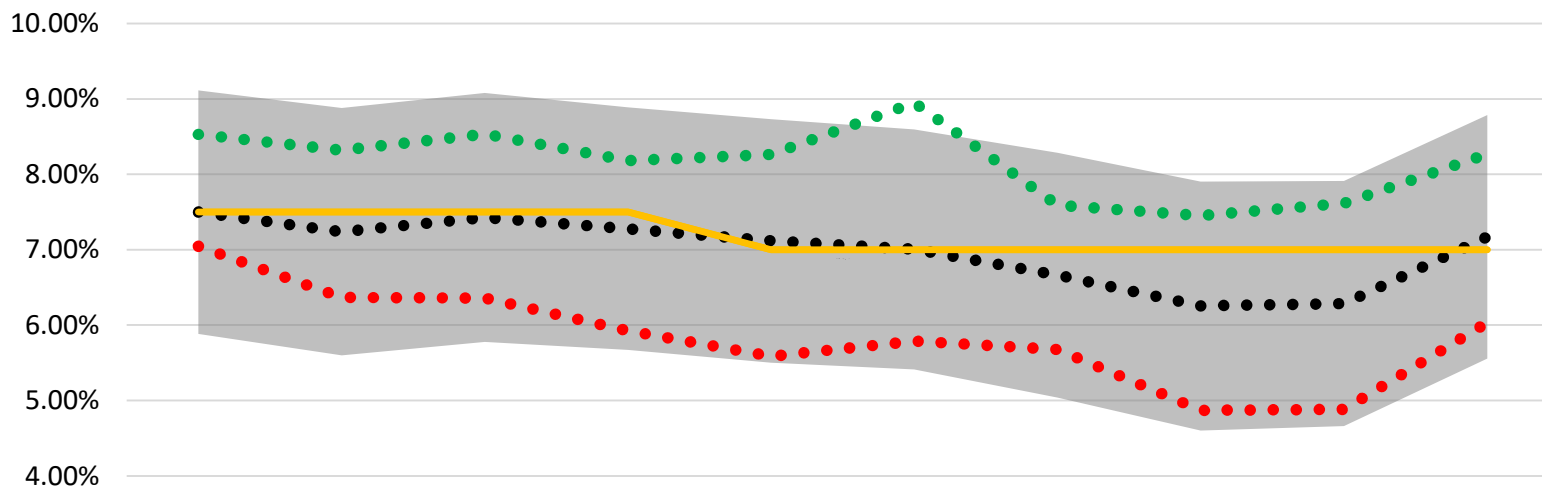


**Exhibit 14**

The following exhibit shows the range of expected annualized returns for each of the surveys from 2014 to 2023 over a 20-year horizon. The results for 2019 through 2023 reflect the same hypothetical asset allocation as shown in Exhibit 13. Note that the hypothetical asset allocation was modified slightly in 2019 to include a small allocation to private debt. Please refer to the 2018 survey for the hypothetical asset allocation used to develop the results for 2014 through 2018. Similar to Exhibit 13, the benchmark return for this hypothetical plan is indicated by the gold line. The most conservative advisor in each survey is indicated by the red dotted line and the most optimistic advisor in each survey is indicated by the green dotted line. The black dotted line shows the survey average return and the gray shaded region shows the 25<sup>th</sup> – 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of returns assuming a normal distribution using the survey average return and survey average standard deviation.

**Range of Expected Annualized Returns: 2014 - 2023 Surveys**

Hypothetical Multiemployer Plan | Geometric Returns | 20-Year Horizon



Survey Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Benchmark Return	7.50%	7.50%	7.50%	7.50%	7.00%	7.00%	7.00%	7.00%	7.00%	7.00%
Survey Average	7.50%	7.24%	7.43%	7.28%	7.12%	7.01%	6.66%	6.25%	6.29%	7.17%

25-75th Percentile    
  Survey Average    
  Benchmark Return    
  Conservative Advisor    
  Optimistic Advisor

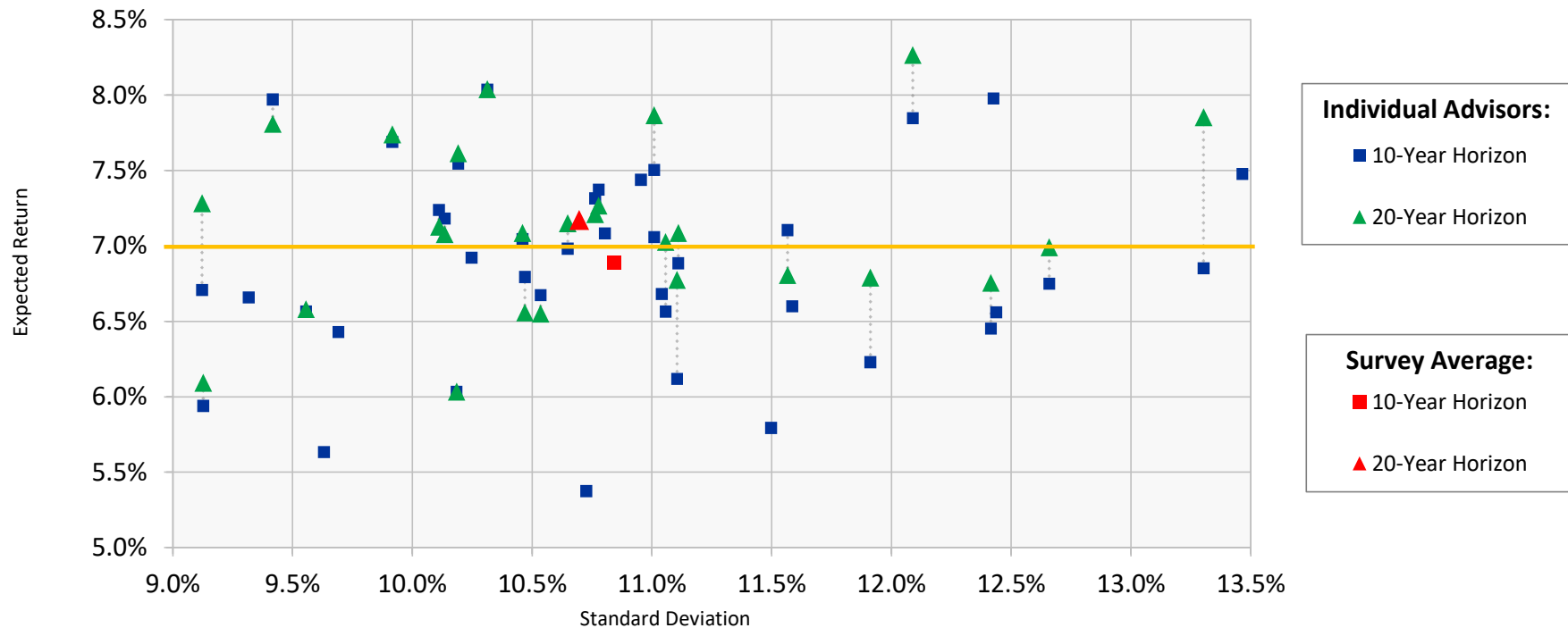
*SOURCE: Horizon Actuarial 2023 Survey of Capital Market Assumptions  
 Expected returns over a 20-year horizon are based a subset of 27 survey participants who provided long-term assumptions.*

**Exhibit 15**

The following exhibit shows the distribution of expected annualized returns and annual standard deviations for the same hypothetical asset allocation that is shown in Exhibit 13. The expected annualized return and annual standard deviation of the hypothetical asset allocation are shown separately for each advisor who participated in the survey. Individual advisors are shown separately by investment horizon, and the short- and long-term assumptions for advisors who provided both are connected by a dotted line. The survey average assumptions are shown in red. Similar to Exhibit 13, the benchmark return of 7.00% for this hypothetical plan is indicated by the gold line. The exhibit shows that there are a wide variety of investment return assumptions that could be considered to be reasonable for any given asset allocation.

**2023 Survey: Distribution of Expected Portfolio Returns and Standard Deviations by Advisor**

Hypothetical Multiemployer Plan | Geometric Returns



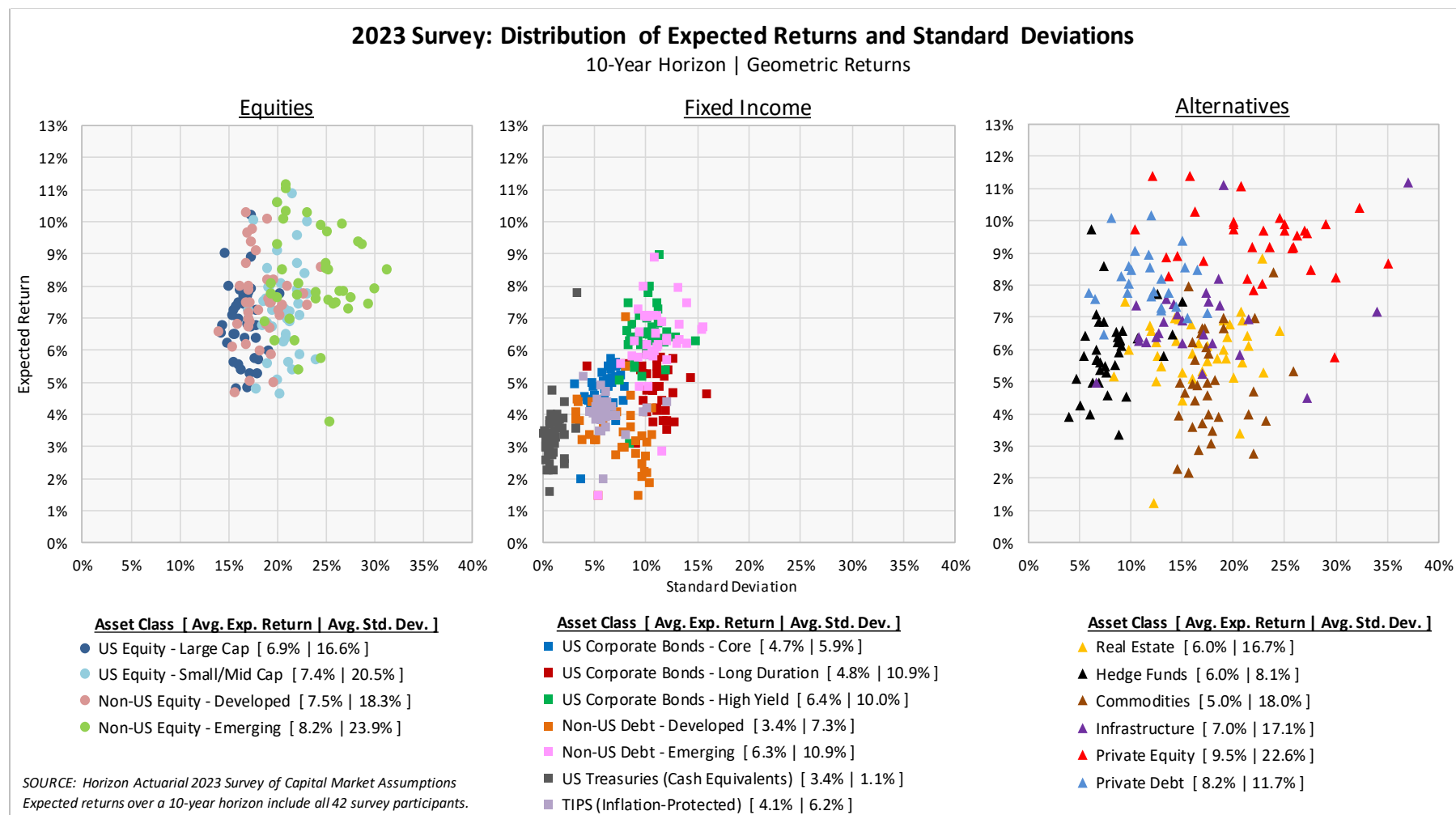
SOURCE: Horizon Actuarial 2023 Survey of Capital Market Assumptions  
 Expected returns over a 10-year horizon include all 42 survey participants.  
 Expected returns over a 20-year horizon are based a subset of 27 survey participants who provided long-term assumptions.





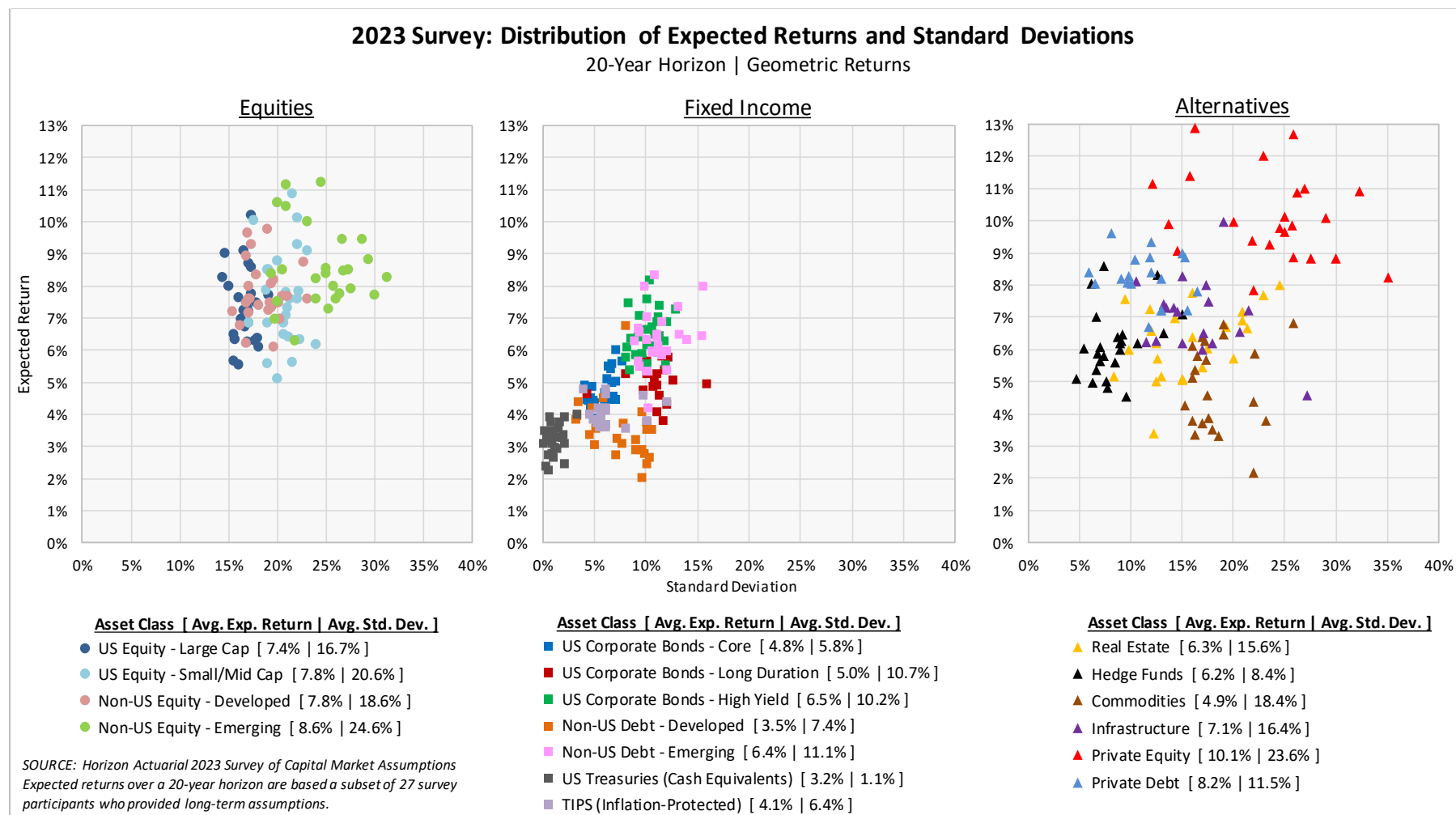
## Exhibit 17

Earlier in this report, Exhibit 5 showed the distribution of expected returns and standard deviations for all 42 advisors who provided short-term assumptions. The exhibit below shows the same distribution, broken out by asset type: equities, fixed income, and alternatives. Note that the average expected return and standard deviation from the 2023 survey are listed in brackets for each asset class. Also note that every advisor did not provide expectations for every asset class.



## Exhibit 18

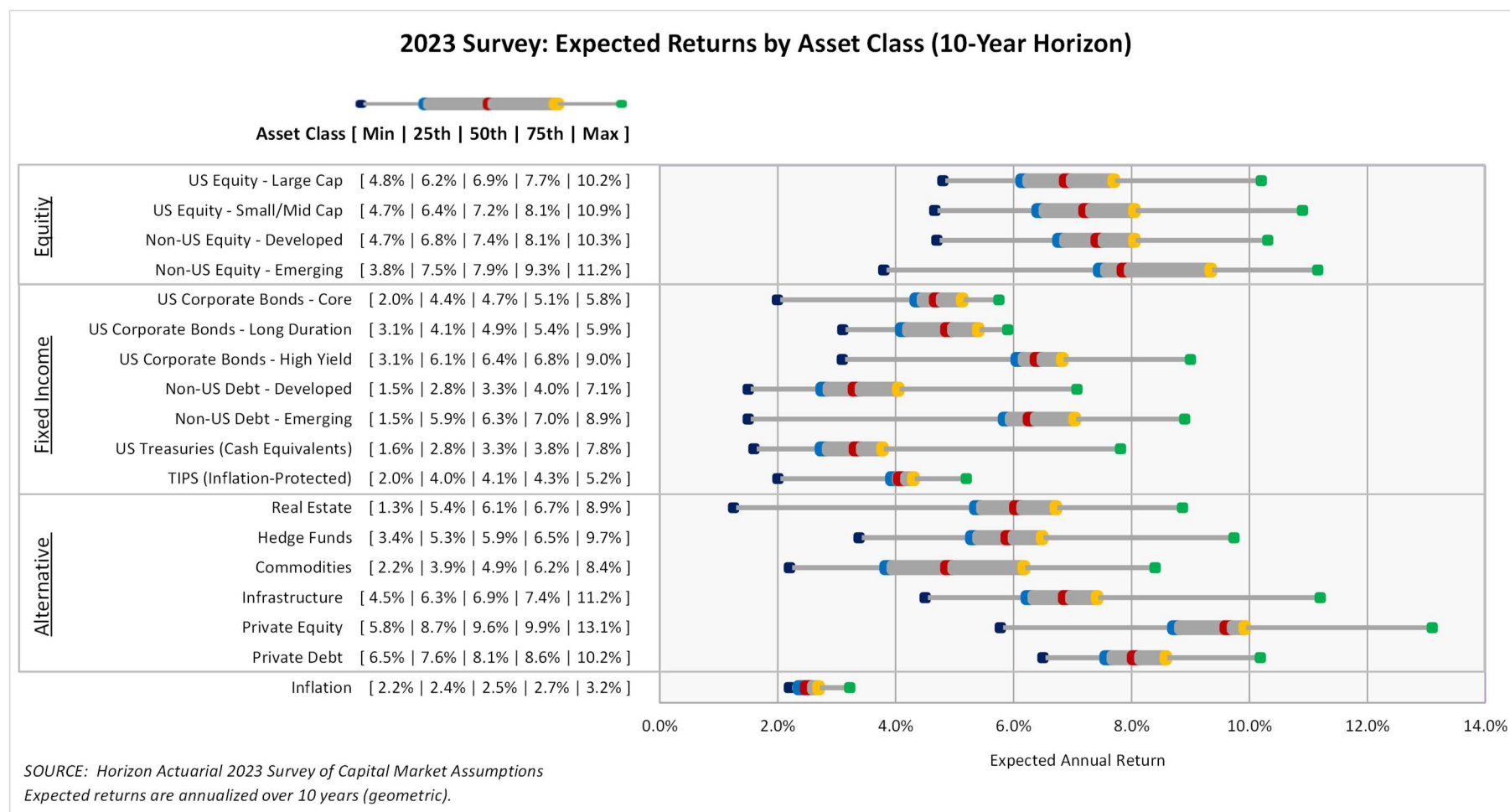
Exhibit 17 showed the distribution of expected returns and standard deviations over an investment horizon of 10 years. The exhibit below shows the same distribution, but for a horizon of 20 years. Note that while Exhibit 17 included all 42 advisors in the survey, the exhibit below only includes assumptions for the 27 advisors who provided longer-term assumptions (horizons of 20 years or more). Also note that every advisor did not provide expectations for every asset class.



## Exhibit 19

The exhibit below shows the ranges of expected annual returns for different asset classes over a 10-year investment horizon. The ranges shown below include assumptions for all 42 advisors in the 2023 survey. Expected returns shown below are annualized (geometric).

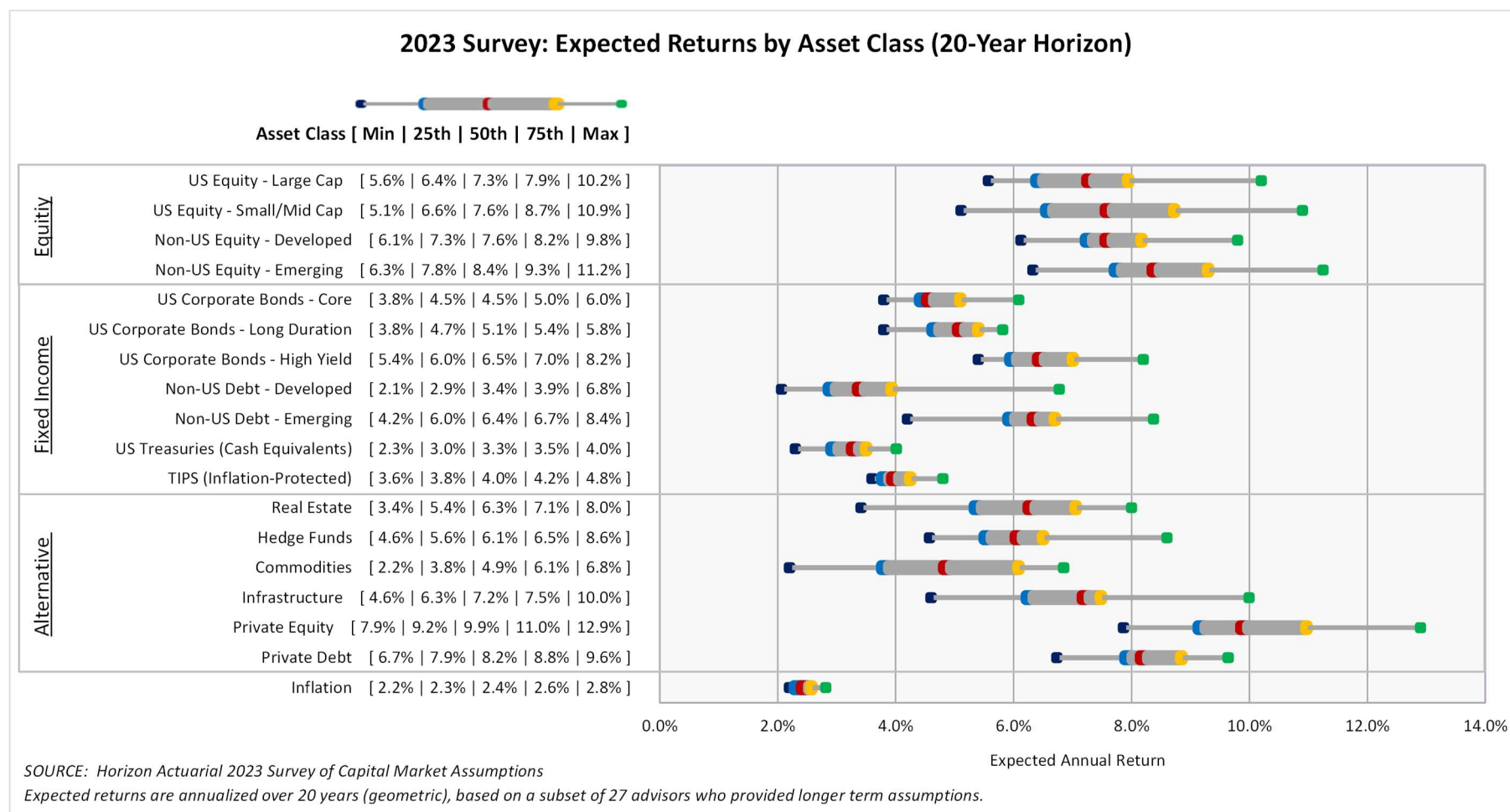
To illustrate the distribution of expected returns, the exhibit shows the range of the middle 50 percent of results: the range between the 25th and 75th percentiles. It also shows the median expected return for each asset class: the 50th percentile. Note that the expected returns for the *median* advisor shown below are not the same as the *average* expected returns shown elsewhere in the report. In most cases, however, the differences between median and average expected returns are relatively small.



## Exhibit 20

The exhibit below shows the ranges of expected annual returns for different asset classes over a 20-year investment horizon. The ranges shown below are based on the assumptions for 27 advisors who provided longer-term assumptions (horizons of 20 years or more). Expected returns shown below are annualized (geometric). Note that the ranges of expected returns are somewhat narrower when the investment horizon is longer.

To illustrate the distribution of expected returns, the exhibit shows the range of the middle 50 percent of results: the range between the 25th and 75th percentiles. It also shows the median expected return for each asset class: the 50th percentile. Note that the expected returns for the *median* advisor shown below are not the same as the *average* expected returns shown elsewhere in the report. In most cases, however, the differences between median and average expected returns are relatively small.



SOURCE: Horizon Actuarial 2023 Survey of Capital Market Assumptions

Expected returns are annualized over 20 years (geometric), based on a subset of 27 advisors who provided longer term assumptions.