coinchange

2026

Institutional Outlook

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MERGE

MERGE is a leading institutional crypto and Web3 conference bridging Latin America and Europe.

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Executive Summary

This report provides a comprehensive outlook on the institutional digital asset landscape for 2026, analyzing macroeconomic drivers, regulatory developments, market infrastructure, and investment strategies. It serves as a guide for asset managers, financial institutions, and corporate treasuries navigating the convergence of traditional finance and blockchain technology into hybrid finance.

The 2026 institutional digital asset landscape is defined by a constructive macro backdrop — Fed rate cuts stabilizing at 3.5–3.75%, persistent inflation concerns, and U.S. dollar debasement driving demand for alternative monetary assets — coupled with explosive market maturation. Global crypto ETPs have attracted $87 billion in net inflows since 2024, stablecoin supply exceeds $310 billion with 300% quarterly growth following the GENIUS Act, yet less than 0.5% of U.S. advised wealth is allocated to digital assets, signaling massive rebalancing headroom. Institutional custody has achieved critical mass with BNY Mellon live, Citi launching in 2026, and bank-grade MPC key management becoming standard, while DTCC's tokenization service (authorized December 2025) will enable T+0 settlement of Russell 1000 equities and Treasuries by H2 2026, creating unified TradFi-DeFi liquidity pools.

Tokenization has emerged as the dominant growth vector, with money-market funds (BlackRock BUIDL, JPMorgan MONY) reaching $7.4 billion and projected to scale to $25-30 billion by end-2026, while the total addressable market for real-world assets could reach $18.9 trillion by 2033. Institutional yield generation has matured beyond speculative DeFi into structured four-layer stacks: protocol staking ($245 billion market), tokenized credit (6-12% APY), real-world assets (8-15% yields), and cautious restaking adoption. The shift to on-chain markets is accelerating, with decentralized perpetuals handling $5-10 billion daily volume, Ethereum L2s achieving 400ms block times, and AI-driven execution reducing slippage by 35%, though liquidity fragmentation across 12+ chains and MEV leakage remain critical operational challenges.

Regulatory clarity is crystallizing but uneven: the U.S. GENIUS Act established comprehensive stablecoin rules in July 2025, MiCA Phase II launches Q2 2026 addressing DeFi/NFTs, and the UK FCA's prudential framework (CP25/42) sets capital buffers and custody standards, yet cross-border fragmentation creates compliance arbitrage risks. Policy divergence between CBDC pilots and private stablecoins intensifies, with prediction markets (Polymarket, Kalshi) reaching $27.9 billion volume but facing state-level bans and jurisdictional uncertainty. Scenario analysis suggests a 50% probability base case of gradual integration ($3.5-4T crypto market cap, $800B-1T tokenized assets) versus 35% bull case ($4.5-5T, $3.5T tokenized) if bipartisan market structure legislation passes. Success requires institutional stakeholders to master a new compliance stack — on-chain AML/KYC, proof-of-reserves, prudential capital (€150K base + 2% custody add-ons), and slashing insurance — while capturing first-mover advantage in digital-asset management as portfolios shift from simple BTC/ETH exposure to integrated yield-bearing, tokenized-fund, and RWA strategies.

Pretext: 2025 Digital-Asset Management Inflection

The year 2025 marked an irreversible inflection point in institutional digital-asset management, as regulatory clarity, infrastructure maturation, and product innovation converged to transform crypto from a speculative fringe into a core allocation class. The July passage of the GENIUS Act established the first comprehensive federal stablecoin framework in the U.S., mandating 100% reserve backing and bank charter pathways that catalyzed a 300% quarterly surge in institutional stablecoin inflows to $45.6 billion. Simultaneously, spot Bitcoin ETPs — launched in January 2024 — crossed $87 billion in global net inflows by December 2025, with institutional investors holding 24% of the U.S. complex and advisory channels emerging as the fastest-growing 13F segment. This occurred alongside successful ECB wholesale CBDC trials, the UK FCA's publication of three landmark consultation papers (CP25/40–42), and Korea's pilot program opening 3,500 listed companies to crypto trading, creating a regulatory mosaic that, while fragmented, provided sufficient clarity for institutional capital to activate at scale.

Infrastructure achieved institutional-grade robustness in 2025, eliminating the existential risks that previously limited allocation. BNY Mellon became the first U.S. G-SIB to offer live digital-asset custody for BTC and ETH with unified on-chain/traditional reporting, while DTCC's December SEC No-Action Letter authorized tokenization of Russell 1000 equities and Treasuries for H2 2026 rollout — enabling T+0 settlement and 24/7 collateral mobility. Tokenized money-market funds emerged as the breakout product, with BlackRock's BUIDL reaching $2 billion AUM and the segment growing 80% year-to-date to $7.4 billion, while prime brokers began accepting tokenized MMFs as collateral at 3:1 leverage ratios. Cyber insurance coverage expanded to $100–300M per client, SOC 2 Type II audits became baseline, and proof-of-reserves attestations integrated cryptographic verification with traditional audits, reducing operational error rates by an estimated 60% and satisfying fiduciary requirements for custody and settlement finality.

Capital deployment patterns validated the infrastructure buildup: corporate treasuries across 190 public companies amassed over 1 million BTC (a fourfold increase in 18 months), Harvard Management Company and Mubadala became early ETF adopters, and institutional staking participation unlocked after the SEC clarified custodial staking does not constitute a securities transaction, enabling ETPs to capture yield on Proof-of-Stake assets. Stablecoin supply surpassed $310 billion, processing $1.1 trillion in monthly transactions, while decentralized perpetuals reached $5–10 billion in daily volume — rivaling mid-tier CEXs.

Prediction markets institutionalized with $27.9 billion in volume as Polymarket and Kalshi achieved $9–11 billion valuations, and AI-driven analytics adoption among institutional allocators tripled to 60%. This confluence of regulated product access, bank-grade custody, and demonstrable capital efficiency set the stage for 2026, as the industry shifts from proving viability to scaling adoption across wealth management, treasury operations, and portfolio construction.

1. Macro & Market Backdrop

Macro Drivers: Liquidity, Rates, and Dollar Outlook

The 2026 macroeconomic environment presents a complex but constructive backdrop for institutional digital asset allocation. The Federal Reserve concluded 2025 having cut rates three times, with policy rates expected to stabilize around a neutral level of 3.5–3.75% — more hawkish than market pricing but supportive of risk assets relative to prior hiking cycles. Vanguard projects U.S. real GDP growth of 2.25% for 2026, though the first half may register softer as lagged effects of 2025 tariffs and demographic headwinds dissipate. Inflation is forecast to remain sticky above the Fed's 2% target, limiting scope for aggressive easing but sustaining nominal yields that bolster crypto's appeal as a fiat debasement hedge.

The U.S. dollar's structural challenges — compounded by public debt levels that have pushed currency-in-circulation ~32% higher since 2019 (2019's $1,759.8 billion vs. 2024's $2,322.9 billion, per the Federal Reserve's value of currency in circulation) — are intensifying institutional demand for alternative monetary assets. Bitcoin's programmatic scarcity (the 20 millionth coin will be mined in March 2026) and Ethereum's deflationary mechanics position both as macro hedges in an era of fiscal dominance. Institutional investors are increasingly modeling crypto as a portfolio ballast: Grayscale estimates that less than 0.5% of U.S. advised wealth is currently allocated to digital assets, suggesting substantial rebalancing headroom as platforms complete due diligence and build capital-market assumptions.

Market Structure Changes: ETFs, Inflows, and Stablecoin Expansion

Spot Crypto ETPs

Since the January 2024 U.S. launch of spot Bitcoin ETPs, global crypto exchange-traded products have attracted $87 billion in net inflows as of December 2025. By Q3 2025, institutional investors held 24% of the U.S. Bitcoin ETF complex, with advisory channels representing the fastest-growing segment among 13F filers. Early adopters include Harvard Management Company and Mubadala, and it is forecasted that major wirehouses will formally open Bitcoin ETF allocations in 2026, while at least one major 401(k) provider is expected to enable direct access.

Market Maturation

Unlike prior 1,000%+ retail-driven rallies, Bitcoin's 2024 cycle delivered a 114.1% year-to-date gain by November, reflecting steadier institutional accumulation via spot ETFs and reduced volatility compared to historical cycles. The total crypto market capitalization hovered near $4.22 trillion in Q3 2025. Bitcoin commands a $1.76 trillion market cap with corporate treasuries across 190 public companies holding

over 1 million BTC — a fourfold increase since mid-2024.

Stablecoin Infrastructure

Stablecoin supply reached $310+ billion in 2025, averaging $1.1+ trillion in monthly transactions over the six months ending November. The GENIUS Act's passage in July 2025 catalyzed a 300% quarterly surge in net stablecoin inflows to $45.6 billion, as issuers like Circle secured bank charters and institutional capital poured into regulated payment stablecoins. U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent projects a $3 trillion stablecoin market by 2030, underscoring the asset class's migration from trading utility to core settlement infrastructure.

Short Scenario Table (Bull / Base / Bear)

Scenario	Probability	Key Triggers	Crypto Market Implications	Institutional Allocation Signal
Bull	30%	Fed cuts below 3% on growth scare; $200B+ ETF inflows; MiCA Phase II accelerates EU tokenization	Bitcoin >$125K; crypto market cap >$6T; tokenized funds exceed $25B AUM	Accelerated model-portfolio adoption; 2–5% allocation becomes standard
Base	50%	Fed holds at 3.5%; $100B ETF inflows; stablecoin regime operational in US/UK	Bitcoin $85K–$105K; market cap $4.5–$5T; tokenized funds reach $15B AUM	Gradual 0.5–1.5% allocation; custody + staking bundles gain traction
Bear	20%	Recession triggers risk-off; regulatory reversal; major custodian exploit	Bitcoin <$60K; market cap <$3T; DeFi TVL drops 40%	Allocation capped at 0.25%; flight to regulated stablecoins only

2. Regulatory Landscape & Policy

Milestones Across Key Jurisdictions (2025–2026)

United States

The GENIUS Act (July 2025) established the first comprehensive federal stablecoin framework, mandating 100% reserve backing and issuer licensing. In Q4 2025, the House advanced the CLARITY Act, delineating SEC-CFTC jurisdiction over digital assets, while the Anti-CBDC Surveillance State Act prohibited retail CBDC issuance, cementing private stablecoins' role. For 2026, Grayscale expects bipartisan crypto market-structure legislation to pass, enabling regulated trading of digital-asset securities and on-chain issuance by mature firms.

European Union

MiCA Phase I (stablecoins) is fully implemented; Phase II (DeFi, NFTs) is slated for Q2 2026, addressing remaining regulatory gaps. The European Central Bank's wholesale CBDC trials, leveraging Deutsche Börse's D7 DLT, concluded successfully in 2025, laying groundwork for tokenized settlement.

United Kingdom

The FCA published three consultation papers in December 2025 — CP25/40 (trading platforms, staking, DeFi), CP25/41 (admissions, disclosures, market abuse), and CP25/42 (prudential requirements for cryptoasset firms) — with final rules expected in 2026. The UK's stablecoin regime under the Financial Services and Markets Act is anticipated to take effect in Q1 2026.

APAC

Korea's FSC launched a pilot program in June 2025 allowing 3,500 listed companies to trade crypto via independent custodians, with full institutional opening slated for 2026 review. Hong Kong and Singapore finalized stablecoin licensing frameworks, while Japan amended its Payment Services Act to permit bank custody of cryptoassets.

Legislative Clarity vs. Remaining Friction

Product Rollout Enablers

Clear issuance and redemption rules for stablecoins have unlocked tokenized money-market funds (MMFs) as treasury-management tools; JPMorgan, BlackRock (BUIDL), and Franklin Templeton now offer on-chain MMFs to qualified investors. Prudential frameworks (e.g., FCA CP25/42) define capital buffers,

segregation requirements, and stress-testing protocols, enabling banks to offer custody without regulatory arbitrage.

Legal Friction Points

- **Custody Definitions:** Jurisdictional variation persists on whether crypto custody constitutes a securities activity (U.S.) or a MiFID II service (EU), complicating cross-border offerings.
- **Securities vs. Commodities:** The CLARITY Act's final text remains pending, leaving staking rewards and governance tokens in legal limbo.
- **Tax Reporting:** No unified standard exists for token-transfer withholding; the IRS has yet to issue guidance on DeFi yield taxation, creating operational risk for fund administrators.

Policy Risks and Cross-Border Fragmentation

The IMF warns that stablecoin issuance hitting $300 billion elevates macro-financial stability risks, particularly in emerging markets vulnerable to currency substitution. The Financial Stability Board cautioned in 2025 that "gaps and inconsistencies" in implementing global standards could enable regulatory arbitrage, as evidenced by North Korea's $1.5 billion Bybit hack laundered through unregulated OTC brokers and cross-chain bridges. Fragmentation between the U.S. principles-based approach and EU's prescriptive MiCA rules may bifurcate liquidity pools, increasing compliance costs for global asset managers.

3. Market Infrastructure & Custody / Settlement

Current State of Institutional Custody

Bank Custody Services

By Q4 2025, BNY Mellon remained the leading U.S. G-SIB offering live digital-asset custody for BTC and ETH, leveraging a unified dashboard that integrates on-chain and traditional reporting. Citi announced plans to launch institutional-grade custody by 2026, while Deutsche Bank and HSBC expanded tokenized-securities custody via partnerships with Metaco and Crypto Finance.

New Entrants

Clearstream, in partnership with Crypto Finance (MiCAR-licensed since January 2025), began offering settlement and custody to institutional clients in April 2025, routing orders through existing Swift connectivity and its ICSD framework. JPMorgan's Kinexys Digital Assets platform now supports tokenized MMFs, positioning the bank as a vertically integrated custodian-tokenizer.

Insurance & Security

Leading custodians provide $75M–$320M in cyber-insurance per client, with multi-party computation (MPC) key management and SOC 2 Type II audits forming baseline standards. However, insurance gaps persist for slashing events and smart-contract failures, prompting demand for parametric cover.

On-Chain Settlement Initiatives

DTCC Tokenization

On December 11, 2025, DTCC received an SEC No-Action Letter authorizing its subsidiary DTC to tokenize Russell 1000 equities, ETFs, and U.S. Treasuries in a controlled production environment, with rollout slated for H2 2026. The service, underpinned by the ComposerX platform, will create a single liquidity pool across TradFi and DeFi, enabling 24/7 collateral mobility and programmability while preserving DTC's settlement finality.

Clearstream

The ICSD now supports 24/7 crypto custody and settlement for institutional trades, leveraging Crypto Finance's regulated sub-custody and eliminating the need for clients to establish direct relationships with crypto-native providers.

JPMorgan

The MONY tokenized MMF settles on Ethereum in near-real time, offering daily dividend reinvestment and peer-to-peer transferability — features impossible in legacy T+1 settlement.

Operational Risk, Reconciliation, and Prime Brokerage

Reconciliation

Tokenized funds embed NAV oracles on-chain, enabling automated reconciliation versus manual 24-hour cycles. DTCC's tokenization service features integrated compliance controls including wallet-level policy enforcement and programmable asset capabilities. The infrastructure is designed to enable real-time settlement and automated collateral mobility, replacing batch processes with atomic settlement while maintaining institutional-grade security and transparency.

Prime Brokerage

Crypto prime brokers (including FalconX and Hidden Road) now accept tokenized MMFs as collateral, transforming cash-management products into yield-bearing margin assets that blur the line between custody and credit. This enables institutional clients to deploy tokenized treasury exposure for derivatives margin and trading activities, with major platforms enhancing unlocking 24/7 liquidity utility.

Insurance

Custodians are moving from aggregate policies to per-asset coverage, but gaps remain for validator slashing and cross-chain bridge exploits — key concerns for institutional stakers.

Infrastructure Roadmap to Full Integration

Phase	Timeline	Milestone	Institutional Impact
Custody	2025–2026	G-SIB custody live (BNY, Citi); MiCAR licenses issued	Regulatory capital relief; auditability achieved
Settlement	H2 2026	DTCC tokenization service launch; T+0 for tokenized Treasuries	Intraday collateral mobility; liquidity unlocked
Tokenized Funds	2026	JPM MONY, BlackRock BUIDL scale to $25B AUM	MMFs become 24/7 tradable instruments
24/7 Markets	2027+	CLOBs on L2s; cross-chain atomic swaps	Full institutional participation in DeFi

Custody Standards in 2026: MPC is Assumed, Control is the Differentiator

In 2026, MPC is no longer a selling point. It is assumed. Threshold signing, distributed key generation, no single private key ever existing in one place. Everyone credible has that.

The real question has shifted from “how do you protect the key” to “how do you control the decision to sign”. MPC will happily cosign the wrong transaction if your controls are weak. That is where failures still happen. Blind signing is not an edge case anymore, it is the primary risk vector.

Change management, access controls, incident response, business continuity and segregation of duties are examined with the same lens used for banks and FMIs. Second, transaction level intelligence. Human readable decoding, simulation, policy enforcement and destination controls before a signature is ever produced. Institutions want to know what they are signing, why they are allowed to sign it, and who approved it. Third, governance over the full key lifecycle. Key generation ceremonies, share recovery, rotation, compromise playbooks and disaster recovery that do not collapse back into centralization under stress.

What matters in 2026 is evidence. Logs that cannot be altered. Approvals that can be reconstructed. Policies that are enforced automatically. Insurance is still asked for (again, everyone credible has this), but it is no longer the comfort blanket. Controls are.

MPC is a cryptographic primitive. Institutional custody is an operating model. In 2026, buyers are pricing the operating model, not the cryptography.

What Institutional Settlement Looks Like in the Composability Era

Institutional settlement is no longer about T+2. It is about collapsing risk, funding and asset movement into a single deterministic workflow.

Allocations, confirmations, netting, margining, then eventually DvP. Each step introduces latency, operational risk and capital drag. Onchain infrastructure flips that logic.

Settlement becomes something you design upfront.

This is where composability actually matters for institutions. Not because it is elegant, but because it allows atomic outcomes. DvP enforced as code. Collateral and cash leg verified, policies checked, settlement happens or it does not. No settlement fails like in tradFi.

The next frontier is doing this across domains. Custody, deposit tokens, collateral management, financing desks and trading venues remain distinct applications, but they share state and coordinate execution. That is composability with intent. Institutions do not want everything on one chain (we can see this from how institutions are minting the same product on multiple chains already). They want

multiple systems that can complete a transaction synchronously under known rules.

This is why we are seeing serious momentum behind public, optionally permissioned but interoperable infrastructures such as Canton Network and initiatives involving DTCC. The goal is not DeFi style openness. The goal is deterministic settlement with privacy, permissions and auditability built in. We can see the public chain side of this working with execution and compute privacy layers like Zama.

In that world, custody is no longer just safekeeping. It is an active participant in settlement. Policies, limits and controls are enforced in real time. Capital efficiency improves because assets can be repositioned instantly with properly wrapped assets (until we arrive to native tokenization). Risk teams get transparency instead of end of day reports.

4. Asset Management Product Evolution (ETFs, Tokenized Funds, RWA Funds)

Trend Lines: From Spot ETFs to Tokenized Funds

Spot ETF Maturation

With $82.4 billion in crypto ETP inflows in 2024 (comprising $68 billion into Bitcoin and $14.4 billion into Ethereum products) and U.S. advised-wealth penetration still in early-stage adoption, spot Bitcoin and Ethereum ETPs are transitioning from early-adopter to mainstream allocation tools. The SEC's 2025 approval of in-kind creations/redemptions and mixed Bitcoin-Ether ETPs improved operational efficiency and reduced tracking error.

Tokenized Fund Surge

BlackRock's BUIDL fund (launched March 2024) has grown to over $2.4 billion AUM via Securitize, while JPMorgan's newly-launched MONY fund (seeded with $100 million in December 2025) and Franklin Templeton's BENJI platform (~$740 million AUM) are contributing to a tokenized treasury and money market fund segment that reached approximately $8 billion in 2025, with some estimates placing the market at $8.8 billion by October 2025.

We can expect tokenized funds to capture approximately $25–30 billion by end-2026 as custody and settlement infrastructure matures.

Product Pipeline for 2026

Asset managers are preparing to tokenize:

- Short-duration bond funds (1–3 year Treasuries) for collateral optimization
- Private-credit funds (leveraged loans, direct lending) targeting 8–12% yields
- Real-estate fractionalization funds enabling $10K minimums on commercial properties
- Invoice financing pools for working capital management

"...pretty much all transactions will settle on blockchains eventually, and that all money will be digital." - Bill Winters, CEO of Standard Chartered.

Operational Model for Tokenized Funds

Custody

Tokens are issued to investor wallets on Ethereum, Solana, or Avalanche, with institutional custodians (e.g., BNY, Crypto Finance) securing private keys via MPC. Funds maintain omnibus wallets for pooled investments and segregated wallets for large clients, with on-chain proof-of-reserves published daily.

On-Chain NAV

Smart contracts ingest price oracles (Chainlink, RedStone) for underlying assets (e.g., U.S. Treasuries, repo) and compute NAV every block. Investors can redeem tokens intraday for cash or stablecoins via the fund's transfer agent, with settlement in under 10 minutes versus 24+ hours for legacy MMFs.

Transferability & Secondary Markets

Tokenized fund shares trade on alternative trading systems (ATS) like tZERO and Securitize Markets, providing 24/7 liquidity. Transfer restrictions are encoded in smart contracts: only KYC-approved wallets on an allowlist can receive tokens, ensuring compliance without sacrificing portability.

KYC/AML Rails

Issuers integrate on-chain analytics (TRM Labs, Elliptic) to screen wallets and monitor transaction patterns, with suspicious activity triggering automatic freezes via compliance oracles.

Distribution and Client Segmentation

Institutional (Treasury Management)

Corporate treasurers deploy tokenized MMFs as cash equivalents earning 4–5% yields while retaining instant liquidity for payroll and vendor payments. JPMorgan's MONY targets qualified investors with $1 million minimums, but fractionalization enables sub-$10K participation for mid-market firms.

Family Offices

High-net-worth clients use tokenized private-credit funds to access illiquid yield without lockups, leveraging secondary ATS markets for early exit.

Wholesale (RIA/Private Bank)

Robo-advisors auto-rebalance tokenized bond sleeves (1-3% of portfolios) using on-chain risk metrics.

5. Tokenization of Real-World Assets (RWAs)

Market Sizing and Timelines

2026-2033 Projection

BCG and Ripple forecast the tokenized asset market could reach $18.9 trillion by 2033, implying a 1,000x expansion from today's base.

Current State

As of Q4 2025, tokenized Treasuries and money market funds represent approximately 0.0036% of global equity and bond market capitalization (~$7.4–8.8 billion in tokenized Treasuries/MMFs, per multiple industry trackers). The IMF notes stablecoin issuance alone hit $300 billion in September 2025, serving as the primary on-ramp for RWA demand.

Adoption Curves (Conservative / Midpoint / Aggressive)

- **Conservative:** Tokenized assets reach $50 billion by 2026 (7x growth), driven by MMFs and short-term Treasuries, limited by custody integration delays.
- **Midpoint:** $150 billion by 2026 (20x growth), assuming DTCC's H2 2026 tokenization service unlocks Russell 1000 and ETF liquidity.
- **Aggressive:** $500 billion by 2026 (70x growth), requiring seamless cross-chain interoperability, full MiCA Phase II implementation, and G-SIB prime-brokerage acceptance of tokenized collateral.

Leading Asset Classes to Tokenize in 2026

Money-Market & Short-Duration Debt (70% of 2026 flows)

Tokenized U.S. Treasury and agency securities offer 4–5% yields with sub-minute settlement, making them ideal for corporate treasury stacks and DeFi collateral. RWA.xyz lists dozens of live funds (e.g., Fidelity ILF via Sygnum, WisdomTree funds) with combined AUM exceeding $10 billion.

Private Credit (20% of flows)

Platforms like Centrifuge, Maple Finance, and Goldfinch tokenize invoices, trade receivables, and SME loans, targeting 8–15% net yields. Centrifuge's Anemoy Diversified Credit Fund has scaled to $50 million AUM, with institutional LPs including hedge funds and family offices.

Real-Estate Fractionalization (10% of flows)

Tokenized REITs and single-property SPVs enable $5,000–$10,000 minimums on commercial assets. Platforms like RealT and Blocksquare have tokenized $200M+ in U.S. and European properties, though secondary liquidity remains limited.

Platforms, Custody, Legal Wrappers, and Liquidity

Platforms

Ethereum maintains approximately 50–52% of tokenized asset value (per RWA.xyz and CoinDesk data), followed by Avalanche with $740M across 41 assets and growing institutional adoption, and Solana with $761M in RWA TVL (305% growth). RWA.xyz aggregates live data across 384+ tokens, showing real-time NAV, yield, and volume metrics.

Custody

Institutional issuance often employs a dual custody model where traditional custodians (e.g., Clearstream) hold legal title while crypto custodians (e.g., Crypto Finance) manage token keys. Clearstream announced this structure in March 2025, using Crypto Finance as sub-custodian for institutional crypto asset access.

Legal Wrappers

Funds are frequently structured as Cayman Islands or Luxembourg SPCs with tokenized share classes. Cayman SPCs provide segregated portfolio structures ideal for multiple strategies, while Luxembourg frameworks accommodate tokenized securities under existing 1915 law. Smart contracts embed transfer restrictions to maintain compliance with securities regulations and AML requirements, though specific 4% concentration limits are not standardized.

Liquidity Challenges

Despite 24/7 trading availability, secondary market depth remains limited—WEF notes tokenized assets "still lack sufficient secondary market liquidity and depth in 2025". Primary issuance dominates, with 90% of tokenized stock value concentrated in just 3 Backed Finance products. Bid-ask spreads average 50–150 bps versus 1–2 bps for underlying assets, reflecting limited market-maker participation and KYC allowlist friction. Institutional-grade AMM pilots aim to tighten spreads, though specific 10–20 bps targets for 2026 are aspirational rather than confirmed deployments.

6. Yield Stacks, DeFi vs CeFi Yield, and Automated Borrowing

Institutional Yield Sources in 2026

In 2026, institutional-grade yield originates from four primary layers:

Layer 1: Protocol-Level Staking & LSDs

The global staking market across Proof-of-Stake networks totals approximately $245+ billion. Ethereum commands $107+ billion (35.6M ETH staked, 27.93% of supply), while Solana reaches $66+ billion (391M SOL staked, ~67% staking ratio). Liquid Staking Derivatives (LSDs) like Lido's stETH, Coinbase's cbETH, and Rocket Pool's rETH enable composable yield while maintaining liquidity. Institutional staking APRs range from ~1% on BNB to 6-8% on Solana and 2.9-3.1% on Ethereum. The SEC's May 29, 2025 clarification that custodial staking does not constitute a securities transaction has unlocked regulated participation, with Grayscale launching the first U.S. staking spot crypto ETPs ($8.5B+ AUM) in October 2025.

Layer 2: Lending Markets & Tokenized Credit

DeFi lending protocols deliver 6–12% APY on stablecoin deposits (USDC/USDT) via platforms like Aave and Compound. Institutional permissioned pools on Aave manage $54.7B+ in TVL across all markets, while tokenized short-term credit—including BlackRock's BUIDL, Franklin Templeton's FOBXX, and Ondo's USYC—has reached $7.4-8.8 billion in AUM. These instruments settle on-chain with daily transparency, enabling treasury management at sub-second speeds.

While DeFi continues to attract attention for its pace of innovation, some centralized platforms are able to match both returns and accessibility while offering greater operational simplicity for many users. Matrixport, for example, has offered fixed-income products backed by a diversified loanbook since 2019, delivering consistent yields with no principal defaults across multiple market cycles. In 2025, the platform recorded an increase in assets under management, reflecting sustained client confidence and disciplined risk management. Although stablecoin yields across products such as USDT and USDC have moderated from the elevated levels of prior years, they remain competitive within the digital-asset yield landscape, currently offering returns in excess of 7% per annum.

Layer 3: Structured Products & RWA Yield

Tokenized RWAs have expanded beyond Treasuries into private credit, invoices, and short-duration debt, with total tokenized asset value surpassing $33 billion in 2025. As gold prices reach new all-time highs in 2025, tokenized gold has emerged as the next high-conviction growth segment. Matrixdock's XAUm—a fully vaulted, physically backed gold token—launched in late 2024 and experienced explosive

adoption in 2025. The product's market capitalization expanded by more than 1,000% year-on-year, while its holder base grew from fewer than 1,000 wallets to over 65,000. Growth was driven by multi-chain expansion, including deployment on Sui, Chainlink CCIP-enabled cross-chain functionality, and accelerating institutional demand amid gold's global rally.

Beyond commodities, tokenization is increasingly intersecting with AI-native credit underwriting. Platforms like Karus underwrite auto loans with predictive models trained on 20 million historical outcomes, generating $9–12 million EBITDA per $100 million deployed. Senior-secured credit pools offer 8–15% APY, with risk tiers transparently priced on-chain.

In parallel, structured products are gaining prominence as institutional demand for customization, yield optimization, and hedging intensifies in an increasingly mature digital-asset market. Matrixport, which offers a comprehensive suite of structured solutions, recorded an increasing trading volume in 2025, underscoring the growing role of engineered yield products in institutional portfolio construction.

Layer 4: Restaking & Composable Security

Liquid restaking via EigenLayer, Karak, and Symbiotic allows single collateral to secure multiple networks. EigenLayer has reached $18-25B TVL, though yields typically range 4-8% rather than 15-40%. Restaking adoption has been more measured than initially projected, with institutions preferring slashing-protected delegated staking over complex restaking stacks due to risk management concerns.

The yield landscape for institutional allocators has matured dramatically, moving beyond speculative DeFi farming into structured, risk-quantified return streams.

DeFi vs. CeFi Yield: Risk-Return Prisms

Dimension	CeFi Yield (Centralized)	DeFi Yield (Decentralized)
Custody Model	Custodial (platform holds keys)	Non-custodial (user holds keys)
Regulatory Status	High compliance; KYC/AML enforced	Low regulation; permissionless access
Yield Sources	Staking-as-a-service, lending, MMF products	Protocol staking, AMM pools, flash loans
Transparency	Low (internal books private)	High (on-chain auditable)
Counterparty Risk	Exchange insolvency, regulatory seizure	Smart contract exploit, governance attacks
Typical APY	3–6% on staked ETH; 4–5% on MMFs	6–12% on stablecoin lending; 15–40%

		restaking
Liquidity	Deep order books; instant fiat ramps	AMM pool depth varies; 24/7 settlement

CeFi Advantages

Coinbase, Binance, Cactus Custody, and Anchorage Digital offer institutional custody with integrated staking, slashing protection, and seamless fiat on/off-ramps. Anchorage Digital's fiduciary income from crypto custody grew >50% YoY from 2023 to 2024, reaching $29.4 million in H1 2025. Cactus Custody, a subsidiary of Matrixport, has also seen an uptick in institutional interest, safeguarding multi-billion-dollar assets for over 300 global institutions, adding 177 new clients in 2024 alone (reaching ~$4 billion AUM that year), and continuing to expand through high-profile partnerships (e.g., with KuCoin Institutional, Bybit, Chorus One for ETH staking, and others). These platforms provide audit trails, insurance wrappers, and regulatory recourse—critical for treasury mandates.

DeFi Advantages

Aave, Compound, and Curve offer non-custodial transparency and composability. Liquidity providers in prediction markets can earn 20–120% APY during peak events (e.g., Super Bowl markets) by supplying USDC/USDT to platforms like Polymarket and Kalshi. AI-driven automation now manages lending, borrowing, and yield optimization across protocols in real time, minimizing human emotion and capturing MEV opportunities through agents like Almanak AI and Optimus that analyze 20M+ historical outcomes. DeFi lending on Aave typically yields 4–7% APY on stablecoins in 2025.

Hybrid Model

Institutions increasingly adopt "CeDeFi" stacks—using CeFi for onboarding/custody and DeFi for yield generation. For example, a treasury holds USDC in Coinbase custody, then deploys it via MetaMask Institutional into Morpho's permissioned pools (powered by Aave), earning 4–10.8% APY while meeting compliance requirements. Coinbase's DeFi integration automatically provisions smart contract wallets and allocates funds across curated vaults, combining familiar CeFi UX with DeFi yields. This model balances security, regulatory compliance, and enhanced returns through yield stacking strategies

Automated Borrowing: On-Chain Credit Rails

Automated borrowing primitives have evolved beyond simple overcollateralized loans into sophisticated margining and liquidity management tools.

On-Chain Credit for Asset Managers

Institutional borrowers now access automated credit rails for:

- Intraday liquidity management: Flash loans fund settlement gaps in tokenized MMF redemptions.
- Cross-margining: DeFi protocols automatically calculate collateral haircuts across positions, reducing capital buffers.
- Reconciliation & NAV impact: Real-time on-chain data feeds enable instant NAV recalculation for tokenized funds, integrating staking rewards and lending income seamlessly.

Flash Loans & Instant Liquidity

Flash loans—pioneered by Aave—allow uncollateralized borrowing up to pool liquidity limits for multi-asset transactions (ETH, DAI, USDC, WBTC) with a 0.09% fee.

Use cases for institutions include:

- Arbitrage & Liquidations: MEV bots execute cross-DEX price corrections, earning risk-free spreads.
- Collateral Swaps: Borrowers refinance debt positions without closing them, swapping collateral from token B to C via flash loan, improving capital efficiency.
- Debt Repayment: Treasury desks repay loans using collateral in a single atomic transaction, avoiding manual rebalancing.

Credit Risk & Controls

Despite automation, risks persist:

- Smart contract bugs: Euler Finance's $197 million exploit in 2023 underscored audit imperatives.
- Governance attacks: DAO votes can alter collateral factors or pause markets.
- Liquidity squeezes: During market stress, AMM pools can depeg, causing slashing-like losses.

Institutions mitigate these via multi-sig governance participation, insurance wrappers (e.g., Nexus Mutual), and circuit breakers that halt borrowing if utilization exceeds 90%.

Margining Primitives & Credit Delegation

Protocols like dYdX and Euler Finance offer zero-fee flash loans optimized for margin trading. Credit delegation—enabled by Aave—allows institutions to delegate unused credit lines to trusted counterparties, earning a spread on underutilized capital.

The End of Mercenary Capital: How Institutional Rails Enforce Cost-of-Capital Discipline

In 2026, liquidity bootstrapping shifts from "permissionless renting" to "structured origination." As

tokenized cash (T-bills, Stablecoins) and RWAs become the dominant collateral types, the "spray and pray" incentive model dies.

5 Key Shifts for 2026:

1. **Retention > TVL**: Protocols will stop paying for "Day 1 TVL" and start paying for "Day 90 Retention." Attribution technology will move from tracking volume to tracking behavior, penalizing mercenary rotators programmatically.
2. **The "Yield Curve" Standardization**: DeFi yields will compress toward a transparent risk premium over the Risk-Free Rate (T-Bills). LPs won't ape into 40% APY without understanding the source; they will demand a clear "spread" analysis (e.g. T-Bill + 500bps Protocol Risk).
3. **Bookrunners replace Airdrops**: Large-scale liquidity events (>$50M) will no longer be left to chance via Twitter threads. They will be orchestrated by onchain bookrunners who secure soft-circles from known counterparties before the vault opens.
4. **Compliance as a Feature**: Permissioned/Whitelisted vaults (using credentials like zkTLS or onchain KYB) will command the deepest liquidity pools, as they are the only venues where Trillion-dollar asset managers can legally deploy.
5. **Cost of Capital Discipline**: Protocols will treat liquidity incentives as "Customer Acquisition Cost" (CAC). If the LTV of the liquidity doesn't justify the CAC, the incentives will be cut algorithmically.

"*The era of renting liquidity is over. In 2026, the winners won't be the protocols with the highest APY, but the ones who can orchestrate sticky, institutional capital at the lowest effective cost. We are moving from a casino economy to a capital markets economy.*" — Max Yamp, CEO of Yield Network

7. Staking, Liquid Staking and Institutional Adoption

Institutional Staking Adoption: From Optional to Operational

Staking has transitioned from a niche crypto activity to core treasury infrastructure in 2026, driven by three converging forces: maturing infrastructure, regulatory clarity, and client demand for yield.

Custodian Staking Offerings

Major custodians now embed staking directly into custody platforms:

- **Coinbase**: cbETH commands the second-largest LSD market share, favored by U.S. institutions for its regulatory comfort, though limited DeFi composability.
- **Anchorage Digital**: Offers stake-as-a-service for Proof-of-Stake assets, with slashing insurance and automated reward tracking.
- **Zodia Custody**: Provides segregated staking with validator delegation policies, ensuring assets remain under custody and never co-mingled.

Stake-as-a-Service & Governance

Institutions face a choice: run validators directly or delegate to professional node operators. Direct validation offers maximum control but requires technical expertise, 24/7 monitoring, and slashing risk management. Delegated staking via Lido, Rocket Pool, or institutional providers like Everstake outsources operations while retaining governance rights. Lido commands 24.7% of all staked Ethereum (~9M ETH) as the largest liquid staking provider, while Rocket Pool holds ~2.7% market share of liquid staking TVL ($1.7B).

Insurance & Slashing Protection

Slashing risk — penalties for validator misbehavior — remains the primary concern. Institutional-grade providers offer slashing protection via mutualized pools or third-party underwriters. Lido maintains a DAO-managed Slashing Coverage Fund holding ~6,600 stETH for potential losses, supplemented by operator bonds in its Community Staking Module (CSM) that absorb slashing penalties before socializing across stETH holders. Rocket Pool requires node operators to post RPL collateral (10-150% of bond value) as insurance to protect regular stakers from operator slashing or poor performance, not to protect node operators themselves.

Liquid Staking Derivatives: Accounting & Regulatory Status

Accounting Treatment

LSDs like stETH (Lido) and rETH (Rocket Pool) are receipt tokens representing staked assets plus accrued rewards. Under U.S. GAAP and IFRS, they are classified as intangible assets or financial instruments depending on redemption rights. The rebase mechanism (stETH balance increases) creates tax complexity; wrapped versions (wstETH) appreciate in value instead, simplifying NAV calculation.

Regulatory Status

The SEC's 2025 guidance clarified that liquid staking does not constitute a securities transaction. This enables ETPs and funds to stake assets directly. However, custody rules require segregation of staked assets under NYDFS guidelines, with sub-custody arrangements requiring regulatory approval.

Composability & Peg Risk

LSDs trade at slight discounts during liquidity stress. The stETH/ETH peg remained 0.995–1.00 throughout most of 2025. During the July 2025 liquidity crunch, the peg temporarily dropped to ~0.98–0.99 as AMM liquidity fell from $280M to $180M, driven by stETH loop unwinds and nine-day validator exit queues. However, claims of a 0.94 depeg in March 2025 appear to reference 2022 events (Celsius/Alameda liquidations during the Terra/Luna collapse), not current market conditions. Institutions manage peg risk via overcollateralization — wstETH LTV ratios range 79-93.5% depending on protocol risk parameters (Aave E-Mode: 93.5%, Spark: 79%, Morpho: up to 86%).

Operationalizing Staking in a Fund Structure

Custody & Segregation

Assets must be held in FBO (for benefit of) accounts with third-party custodians, ensuring equitable ownership remains with investors. Zodia Custody's model keeps staked assets segregated by client, with clear separation of duties between validator operators and fund administrators.

Governance Participation

Institutions must decide whether to vote on protocol governance (e.g., Ethereum Improvement Proposals). Large allocators like BlackRock and Fidelity delegate governance to specialized nodes that vote in line with fiduciary duties, avoiding conflicts.

Reconciliation & NAV Impact

Staking rewards accrue continuously, complicating NAV calculation. Fund administrators use on-chain oracles (Chainlink, UMA) to pull real-time reward data, integrating it into daily NAVs. The rebase mechanism requires adjusting token balances daily, while value-accruing LSDs are marked to market like zero-coupon bonds.

Validator Operations vs. Delegated Staking

- **Validator Operations**: Requires 32 ETH (or minipools at 8 ETH via Rocket Pool). Institutions avoid running validators directly due to operational overhead and slashing risk.
- **Delegated Staking**: Preferred model. Institutions delegate to multiple node operators to diversify slashing risk and avoid concentration. For example, a $100 million ETH stake could be split across 10 validators from different providers (Lido, Coinbase, Figment).

8. Markets Becoming On-Chain: Liquidity, Market-Making & Trading Models

The Shift of Liquidity to On-Chain Venues

Decentralized Perpetuals & Derivatives Volume

In 2025, decentralized derivatives trading volumes surged, with decentralized perpetuals becoming one of the fastest-growing DeFi segments. Hyperliquid alone processed $317.6 billion in monthly volume in November 2025, while total decentralized perpetuals trading exceeded $1 trillion monthly for the first time in October 2025. Key drivers include:

- **24/7 Market Access**: Institutional traders demand continuous liquidity, especially for macro hedging during off-hours.
- **Non-Custodial Execution**: Funds retain asset control, reducing exchange counterparty risk.
- **Transparency**: On-chain order books and liquidation data enable real-time risk monitoring.

AMM vs. Order-Book Hybrids

- **Automated Market Makers (AMMs):** Uniswap v3 maintains approximately $2.38 billion daily volume ($71.5B monthly), dominating spot trading with concentrated liquidity. AMMs excel in deep, passive liquidity but suffer from impermanent loss and slippage in volatile markets.
- **On-Chain Order Books:** Hyperliquid's custom L1 achieves 200ms finality with fully on-chain order books. dYdX v4's appchain model uses validator-run order books with ~1-second block times and ~260ms median order latency, attracting professional market makers who require limit orders, maker-taker rebates, and low latency.

Infrastructure for Professional Market-Makers

Institutional market-making on-chain requires:

- **Co-location & MEV Protection**: Validators offer MEV-Boost bundles, allowing market makers to execute arbitrage without front-running.
- **Advanced Order Types**: Stop-loss, iceberg, and TWAP orders are now standard on Hyperliquid and dYdX.

Execution Quality, Latency & 24/7 Trading

Latency Improvements

Ethereum Layer-2s (Base, Arbitrum) and Solana have achieved block times of 200ms–400ms, with soft finality under 2 seconds and hard finality ranging from ~12.8 seconds (Solana) to ~13 minutes (L2s).

Custody/Settlement Improvements

- **Atomic Settlement**: Tokenized MMFs settle T+0 on-chain, eliminating SEC T+2 delays.
- **Cross-Chain Settlement**: Bridges like Wormhole and Axelar enable 24/7 liquidity across Ethereum, Solana, and Avalanche. However, bridge exploits (e.g., $300 million Wormhole hack) remain a key risk, prompting institutions to use custodied bridges (e.g., Circle's CCTP).

24/7 Institutional Trading

The combination of stablecoin settlement, on-chain derivatives, and AI-driven execution has enabled true 24/7 trading desks. For instance, a macro hedge fund can hedge BTC exposure at 2 AM EST using dYdX perpetuals, settling in USDC, with slashing-protected staking covering funding costs. Settlement velocity and transaction scale are critical metrics to track: the 2025 U.S. Digital Asset Report (EO 14178) notes that public-blockchain transaction counts approached 3.8 billion monthly in early 2025, up ~96% year-on-year.

Interplay Between Off-Chain and On-Chain Execution

Cross-Listing & Surveillance

Institutions arbitrage price differences between CME Bitcoin futures and dYdX perpetuals. The CFTC's tokenized collateral initiative (September 2025) allows stablecoin margin for derivatives, blurring the line. Surveillance tools like Chainalysis and TRM Labs monitor cross-venue manipulation, feeding data to both CFTC and DeFi governance.

Regulated Off-Chain Venues

CME and Eurex are launching tokenized collateral repos in 2026, using DTCC's Digital Assets service to settle on-chain while maintaining regulatory oversight. This "regulatory wrapper" allows banks to participate in DeFi liquidity without direct exposure.

Market Structure Evolution

The institutional stack now looks like:

1. **Execution**: CEX for large block trades → DEX for transparent settlement.
2. **Custody**: Bank custody (Anchorage) → self-custody (MPC wallets).
3. **Risk**: Off-chain prime brokerage → on-chain credit delegation.
4. **Reporting**: DTCC reconciliation → real-time on-chain NAV.

Key Risks:

- Liquidity fragmentation: Liquidity splits across 12+ L2s, increasing slippage.
- MEV leakage: Up to 1% of institutional trade volume is lost to MEV bots.
- Regulatory arbitrage: Trading on unregulated DEXs may violate fiduciary rules.

The Regulated Principal Liquidity Perspective

From tradias' institutional lens, European Tier-1 and Tier-2 banks and brokers are now broadly in "evaluate → build" mode on crypto, and we expect a meaningful subset to launch offerings within the current fiscal year. The gating factor is increasingly business-case certainty (expected adoption, frequency, and average ticket sizes), paired with a longer-term roadmap for additional on-chain services and tokenized products. The "end state" many digital-asset teams are converging on is that a material share of future banking infrastructure and capital markets workflows will run on-chain—yet most institutions are still sequencing this transition carefully.

Into 2026, the operational challenge shifts from market access to proof: proving best execution / market conformity across fragmented liquidity venues and producing audit-ready evidence that aligns with internal policies and supervisory expectations. This is compounded by 24/7 market structure, where risk, controls, and incident response cannot assume market closures. A second consistent blocker is trade surveillance: new venues, new assets, and new information sources require upgrades to monitoring systems and, critically, earlier buy-in from Compliance and Risk.

We also see early signals of banks building principal-style liquidity capabilities, exploring tokenized financial products (e.g., funds/equities), and public-sector entities professionalizing processes for seized digital assets.

For European banks, access to crypto liquidity is no longer the constraint. The real requirement is evidencing best execution in a fragmented, 24/7 market—pricing that is market-conform, auditable, and defensible against internal policies and supervisory scrutiny.

In fragmented crypto markets, MiCAR-style best execution extends beyond price to execution certainty, counterparty robustness, and operational resilience. Coordinating across venues to meet these standards is now an institutional capability, not a discretionary trading choice.

How tradias Supports Institutional Launches

- **24/7 market-conform principal crypto liquidity**: Designed to align with internal best-execution

frameworks, including disciplined quoting and full auditability.

- **Gold-standard regulatory licensing support**: Support for principal trading authorization in Germany under **MiFID II** and MiCAR, meeting institutional and regulatory best practices.
- **Post-trade settlement standards**: Frameworks designed to maximize settlement efficiency and working-capital utilization.
- **Inventory-light "gas-station" operating model**: Simplifies market access by enabling banks to trade without holding crypto assets on their balance sheet.
- **Business-case development support**: Assistance with adoption assumptions, revenue drivers, and go-live readiness planning, incorporating trading desk, risk, and compliance input.
- **Operating-model support for surveillance and controls**: Guidance on 24/7 monitoring expectations, escalation frameworks, and expansion across venues and asset coverage.

The Strategic Bridge: Why Bitget TradFi and the Pivot to a Universal Exchange (UEX) Matter

The launch of **Bitget TradFi** marks a sophisticated evolution from a crypto-centric platform to a **Universal Exchange (UEX)**. This transition is not merely an expansion of the product catalog; it is a calculated response to the massive liquidity and systemic importance of traditional markets, integrated seamlessly into the digital asset ecosystem

The Scale of the Opportunity

To understand the technical significance of this move, one must look at the sheer scale of the markets Bitget is now capturing:

- **The Gold Market**: With a total market cap exceeding **$14-15 trillion**, gold remains the ultimate "safe-haven" asset. Bitget's focus on **Gold CFDs (XAU/USD)**, which already recorded over **$100M in single-day volume** during beta, allows crypto traders to hedge against digital volatility without exiting the ecosystem
- **The Forex Market**: As the largest financial market in the world, Forex sees a daily trading volume of over **$7.5 trillion**. By offering major pairs (EUR/USD, GBP/USD), Bitget provides its 120 million users access to the world's most liquid instrument.
- **The Stock & Indices Market**: With the inclusion of major indices like **NAS100** and **US30**, Bitget taps into the global equity market, valued at over **$100 trillion**.

Technical Value Proposition

Bitget TradFi solves a fundamental friction point in modern finance: **fragmentation**.

1. **Unified Collateralization**: By using **USDT** as the universal settlement currency, Bitget eliminates the need for multiple fiat-onramps or complex brokerage accounts. This "Single Account"

architecture allows for instant capital reallocation between a Bitcoin long position and a Gold CFD trade.

2. **Professional-Grade Execution**: The platform offers up to **500x leverage**, deep liquidity, and low-slippage execution. This technical infrastructure is designed for high-frequency macro strategies that were previously inaccessible to the average crypto trader.
3. **Product Diversity**: With 79 trading instruments across Metals, Forex, and Indices, Bitget is positioning itself as a "one-stop-shop" for risk management.

Why This Matters

For Bitget, this choice is about **resilience and growth**. As the boundary between crypto and traditional finance (TradFi) continues to blur, the UEX model ensures that Bitget remains relevant regardless of crypto market cycles. For the user, it represents the **democratization of global macro trading**, bringing the tools of institutional investors to a streamlined, crypto-native interface. In short, Bitget is not just adding assets; it is building the infrastructure for the future of unified global finance.

9. Payments & Stablecoins

Stablecoin Growth & Institutional Treasury Use-Cases

Market Expansion

Stablecoin supply surpassed $300 billion in 2025, dominated by USDT ($176B) and USDC ($74B). Institutional adoption accelerated as stablecoins became programmable treasury tools, enabling 24/7 liquidity, automated payments, and on-chain yield.

Cross-Border Payments

Treasurers use stablecoins to bypass SWIFT delays (1-4 working days) and FX spreads of 1-3 pips (0.0001-0.0003 for major pairs), settling supplier payments and inter-entity transfers in <2 minutes for $0.01-$2 fees. For example:

- Intel could pay Taiwanese chip foundries via USDC on Solana, reducing settlement time from 48 hours to 30 minutes.
- Stripe could integrate USDC payouts in 110 countries, enabling gig economy platforms to pay workers instantly.

Treasury Management & Capital Efficiency

Corporations hold tokenized MMFs (e.g., BlackRock's BUIDL, Franklin Templeton's FOBXX) as yield-bearing treasuries, earning 4.5–5.5% APY while maintaining same-day redeemability. This compresses capital cycles: idle USD from zero-yield bank accounts moves on-chain into tokenized Treasury products — growing from $770M to nearly $9 billion in 2025 — and can be redeemed for operational needs like payroll within hours.

Bank-Issued Tokenized Deposits & MMFs

Product Mechanics

Major banks now issue tokenized deposits — liability tokens representing customer deposits on-chain. For example:

- JPMorgan's JPM Coin processes $1 billion in daily transactions.
- First Abu Dhabi Bank launched a dirham-backed stablecoin under UAE's Payment Token Services Regulation (PTSR).

These tokens are 1:1 redeemable for fiat and interoperable with public blockchains via bridges regulated

by the Bank of England (temporary holding caps: £20K per individual, £10M per business).

Institutional Acceptance

Tokenized MMFs from BlackRock ($2.5B AUM), Franklin Templeton ($708M), and private funds like Hashnote's USYC ($488M) are now accepted as collateral on CFTC-registered derivatives exchanges via a pilot program launched December 2025. This institutionalizes on-chain yield as a risk-free rate proxy for crypto-native portfolios, with the CFTC providing guidance that tokenized money market fund shares can serve as regulatory margin collateral alongside US Treasury securities.

Accounting & Tax

Corporates do not currently have authoritative GAAP guidance that explicitly treats tokenized money market funds as cash equivalents; the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) has added a project to its technical agenda to study whether stablecoins or similar digital assets (which could include tokenized MMFs) can qualify as cash equivalents under existing U.S. GAAP definitions, but no standard has been issued yet.

For U.S. federal tax purposes, Section 1031 like-kind exchange treatment no longer applies to exchanges of digital assets such as stablecoins or tokenized funds, because the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 restricted §1031 nonrecognition to real property exchanges.

Payments Rails Competition: CBDCs vs. Private Stablecoins

CBDC Developments

- Digital Euro: ECB pilots wholesale CBDC for bank settlements in 2026, but retail CBDC is delayed due to privacy concerns.
- Digital Dirham: UAE's AE Coin is live for domestic payments, but foreign stablecoins are prohibited.
- Project mBridge: BIS, Thailand, Hong Kong, UAE, and China trial cross-border CBDC payments, but liquidity is limited compared to USDC.

Private Stablecoin Advantages

Private stablecoins dominate due to:

- Programmability: Smart contracts enable automated payroll, escrow, and conditional payments.
- Interoperability: USDC/USDT work across Ethereum, Solana, Avalanche, and Layer-2s without central bank permission.
- Speed: Settlement finality in 10 seconds vs. CBDC's T+1 in many pilots.

Regulatory Divergence

The UK's centralized FCA regime (effective end-2026) contrasts with the U.S. GENIUS Act's federal-state hybrid (likely Q1 2027). This cross-border fragmentation complicates global treasury strategies, forcing multinationals to hold multiple stablecoins (USDC for U.S., EURC for EU, AE Coin for UAE).

Institutional Strategy

Treasurers should:

1. Pilot low-volume, high-friction payments (e.g., contractor payouts) to build expertise.
2. Select enterprise-grade custodians (Anchorage, Zodia) with BSA/AML compliance and transaction monitoring.
3. Monitor CBDC pilots for future interoperability but deploy private stablecoins now for measurable ROI.

10. Prediction Markets & New Derivatives

Emergence of Regulated Prediction Markets

Market Growth

Prediction markets have institutionalized in 2025, with cumulative trading volume across major platforms reaching $27.9 billion (Jan-Oct). Polymarket dominates crypto-native event contracts with $18 billion in volume, while CFTC-regulated Kalshi captured $9-10 billion in traditional financial, macroeconomic, and political event markets. This growth reflects institutional demand for transparent, real-time probabilistic pricing of policy and market outcomes.

Platform	Funding & Valuation	Notes
Polymarket	Raised $2 billion from Intercontinental Exchange (ICE) at a $9 billion valuation (targeting $12-15B)	Plans native token (POLY) and dedicated Layer-1 blockchain by 2026 to reduce settlement costs and enable institutional-grade throughput.
Kalshi	Secured $1 billion at an $11 billion valuation (up from $5B mid-2025)	Focuses on CFTC-regulated event contracts; partnered with Robinhood; integrated with major data providers for real-time event resolution.

Traditional market makers like DRW and Jump Trading have entered prediction markets, often adopting CLOB models to enhance liquidity. While exact figures vary, platforms like Polymarket and Limitless show tight spreads (e.g., $0.02 on binary outcomes around $0.50 midpoints) due to dedicated order books

Regulatory Landscape

- **CFTC Approval:** Kalshi's 2024 event contract ruling permits nationwide trading in 39 U.S. states, establishing a federal precedent for regulated information markets.
- **SEC Scrutiny:** Polymarket received a conditional no-action letter in 2025 after acquiring a licensed exchange entity, enabling U.S. accredited investor access but maintaining restrictions on retail participation pending final legislation.
- **State Bans:** Nevada and Maryland have banned prediction market access, citing conflicts with state gaming regulations, creating a patchwork legal environment that complicates national rollout.

Use-Cases: Hedging Macro Risk, Policy Research & Alpha Generation

Research & Market Intelligence

Prediction market odds have demonstrated superior accuracy to traditional analyst consensus:

- The 2024 U.S. election saw Polymarket predict key swing state outcomes with 95% accuracy versus 78% for polling averages, with hedge funds integrating these probabilities into volatility models. Moreover, prediction accuracy increases to 95.4% within four hours of event resolution.
- For the Ethereum Pectra upgrade, prediction markets successfully forecasted deployment outcomes. The upgrade activated on May 7, 2025, introducing 11 Ethereum Improvement Proposals (EIPs) including EIP-7251 which increased validator stake limits from 32 to 2,048 ETH, while traditional developer surveys lagged real-time network metrics.
- For on-chain governance, Compound's COMP delegation mechanism enables token holders to delegate voting power to other addresses via smart contract, with checkpoints ensuring voting power is recorded at specific block numbers.

Alternative Alpha Strategies

- **Cross-Platform Arbitrage:** Price discrepancies between regulated U.S. exchanges (e.g., Kalshi) and offshore platforms (e.g., Polymarket) on identical inflation contracts can yield risk-free profit opportunities. For Q4 2025 CPI markets, Kalshi's implied inflation forecasts have shown real-time sensitivity to policy shifts, moving from 3.05% to 3.58% ahead of April releases.
- **Liquidity Provision:** With Bitcoin post-halving supply dynamics fully in play and annual issuance below 1%, market structure has shifted toward demand-side forces. Institutional participation through crypto ETPs has created deeper, more stable liquidity pools, with stablecoin market capitalization reaching $312.63 billion in 2025.
- **Event-Driven Overlay:** Prediction markets offer convexity to policy surprises at a fraction of traditional derivatives costs. These contracts provide real-time consensus on regulatory milestones, with hedge funds monitoring them to anticipate macro shifts before official forecasts adjust. The premium efficiency relative to options on crypto equities depends on contract specifications and market depth, with event contracts currently representing a $10 billion monthly volume asset class.

Regulatory Friction & Institutional Access

Outlook for 2026

- **Enterprise Data Integration:** Expect partnerships between prediction market platforms and financial data providers to scale authenticated data feeds. Kalshi, the world's largest prediction market, has already partnered with Barchart to integrate prediction market data—including

electoral outcomes and economic indicators—across Barchart's platform serving over 32 million investors and 1,000 institutional clients.

- **Tokenization & Governance:** Polymarket is preparing a future POLY token launch to enable governance participation, while pursuing a KYC-compliant U.S. relaunch through its CFTC-licensed clearing entity QCEX.
- **Institutional Clarity:** A Regulatory frameworks are rapidly evolving. Following Kalshi's court victory and the CFTC dropping its appeal in 2025, prediction markets are gaining federal legitimacy. Robinhood is acquiring a 90% stake in MIAX Derivatives Exchange to launch a dedicated futures and derivatives exchange by 2026.

CFTC vs. SEC Jurisdiction

The fundamental tension remains whether event contracts constitute derivatives (CFTC) or securities (SEC). The pending CLARITY Act would grant the CFTC exclusive jurisdiction over digital commodities and includes a $50 million offering exemption threshold, though this applies to digital commodity offerings rather than event contract position limits specifically.

Industry Coalition Lobbying

A coalition including Kalshi, Crypto.com, Robinhood, Coinbase, and Underdog has formed the Coalition for Prediction Markets to lobby for federal preemption of state gambling laws, arguing that "Americans deserve clarity, not 50 conflicting interpretations"

Institutional Access Constraints

While specific institutional risk analyses from major banks have not been publicly disclosed, concerns about concentration risk in politically sensitive contracts have prompted discussion of enhanced oversight measures. Industry compliance frameworks increasingly emphasize that prediction market platforms must develop comprehensive programs addressing market surveillance, anti-manipulation controls, and Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements for institutional participants

11. Risk, Compliance, and Operational Resilience

Key Institutional Risk Vectors for 2026

The maturation of digital asset markets into institutional-grade infrastructure has not eliminated systemic risks but rather transformed their composition. For 2026, four risk categories demand heightened attention from asset managers, custodians, and regulated intermediaries:

- **Regulatory Non-Compliance Risk:** The UK Financial Conduct Authority's CP25/42 (published December 16, 2025) introduces prudential requirements for cryptoasset firms that will require minimum capital buffers, custody capital add-ons, and stress testing frameworks by Q2 2026. The consultation closes February 12, 2026, with final rules expected later in 2026. While stablecoin regulation advanced across jurisdictions in 2025, implementation remains fragmented—the FSB's October 2025 thematic review found stablecoin regulation "fragmented and inconsistent" and implementation progress "slow," with 70% of FSB members expecting alignment on recommendations by end-2026. Firms operating without unified global standards face potential enforcement actions, license revocation, and reputational damage.
- **Counterparty & Custody Failure Risk:** Evolved beyond simple private key management. The Bybit hack in February 2025, which resulted in $1.5 billion in Ethereum losses, demonstrated how attackers exploit unregulated OTC brokers and cross-chain bridges. This single incident represented 44% of total crypto theft ($3.4 billion) through early December 2025. Institutional custodians must implement:
    - Multi-party computation (MPC) key management with SOC 2 Type II attestation, now standard among leading custodians including BitGo, Cobo, and Crypto.com Custody
    - Independent penetration testing and incident response validation comparable to securities custody standards
    - Proof-of-reserves standards using cryptographic attestations (e.g., Merkle tree proofs) verified by third-party auditors, though limitations exist regarding real-time verification and privacy concerns
- **Smart Contract & Operational Risk:** Legal ownership uncertainties and technical vulnerabilities persist. IOSCO's November 2025 report on tokenization found adoption remains limited due to "interoperability challenges and lack of credible settlement assets," amplifying contagion risk across shared DLT networks. DeFi security breaches exceeded $3.1 billion in the first half of 2025 alone, surpassing 2024's total losses of $2.85 billion. Smart contract flaws caused 67% of DeFi losses, predominantly due to unchecked code and poor audit coverage. Access control vulnerabilities emerged as the dominant attack vector, responsible for 59% of total losses (including the Bybit incident), while oracle manipulation exploits accounted for 13% of attacks. October 2025 saw a resurgence of smart contract-focused attacks after months dominated by off-chain exploits.
- **Liquidity Squeeze Risk:** Despite deeper markets, liquidity fragmentation across venues creates significant volatility during stress events. The October 2025 crypto sell-off saw "blue chip" coins experience intraday drops exceeding 30% as order books thinned and decentralized finance protocols shut down from forced liquidations. During the October 10-11, 2025 macro shock, crypto endured a record $19 billion single-day liquidation event, with BTC falling over 14% at lows and altcoins experiencing even steeper declines. The transition to 24/7 trading eliminates traditional market closure pauses, requiring continuous liquidation modeling and real-time collateral management.

- **Infrastructure Latency and Fragmentation:** Multi-custody fragmentation, settlement latency, and interoperability gaps prevent institutions from reconciling exposures or settling in near-real-time. The proliferation of bespoke ledgers and non-interoperable digital representations has created additional fragmentation, with many market participants still dependent on traditional infrastructure for trading. Liquidity is now a "topology problem," with capital concentrated in regulated wrappers (ETFs), carry trades (CME futures), and stablecoins rather than circulating through native exchange order books.
- **Allocation-Timing Risk and Capital Inertia:** Despite high intent (59% of institutional investors planning >5% allocation to crypto in 2025), operational, governance, and fiduciary hurdles may delay flows and flatten the adoption curve, causing growth to follow an S-curve rather than a straight line even under bullish conditions. This survey of 352 institutional investors was conducted in January 2025 by EY-Parthenon and Coinbase, with 86% of respondents either having existing exposure or planning allocations in 2025.

The Institutional Compliance Stack

On-Chain AML/KYC & Analytics Layer

TRTRM Labs' platform demonstrates that regulated Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASPs) show "significantly lower rates of illicit activity than the broader ecosystem" due to behavioral risk detection and real-time cross-chain tracing. Key capabilities include:

- Behavioral scoring beyond simple exposure risk, analyzing transaction patterns for sanctions evasion and mixing service usage.
- Cross-chain tracing automatically mapping funds across 50+ blockchains with unified case management.
- Auditability via timestamped logs and transparent scoring that support Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) and regulator examinations.

Proof-of-Reserves & Attestation Standards

Leading custodians implement cryptographic proof-of-reserves integrated with traditional financial audits. The standard requires:

- Daily Merkle tree snapshots of client liabilities.
- On-chain signatures from custodied addresses proving asset control.
- Independent auditor verification of 1:1 backing.

Automated Compliance Monitoring

AI-enhanced surveillance systems monitor:

- Transaction screening against 100+ sanctions lists with <100ms latency.

- Market abuse detection across fragmented liquidity pools.
- Transfer restriction enforcement (e.g., investor accreditation status embedded in token metadata).
- Real-time capital adequacy calculations under proposed FCA prudential rules (PMR: £150k-£350k, FOR: 25% of annual expenses, KFR: 0.04-2% of assets).

Insurance and Prudential Capital Requirements

Insurance Coverage

Qualified custodians now carry:

- Crime insurance covering up to $100 million+ for theft of private keys (London market capacity), with individual policies such as Marsh's Blue Vault providing up to $150 million per insured through Lloyd's market.
- Specie insurance for cold storage assets with Lloyd's of London syndicates, with London market capacity of $500 million+ and landmark policies such as Coinbase's $255 million coverage.
- Errors & omissions coverage for smart contract failure and operational errors.

Prudential Frameworks

The FCA's Consultation Paper 25/42 proposes risk-based capital requirements for cryptoasset firms :

- Permanent Minimum Requirement (PMR): Ranges from £75,000 (for arranging deals) to £750,000 (for dealing as principal), with £150,000 for operating a cryptoasset trading platform.
- Fixed Overhead Requirement (FOR): 25% of fixed overheads (one quarter of annual expenditure).
- K-Factor Requirements (KFR): Includes 0.04% of qualifying cryptoassets safeguarded for custody providers and 2% of stablecoins in issuance.

MiCA (EU):

- Base capital requirements of €50,000-€150,000 depending on services, with €150,000 for custody/exchange services.
- Asset-referenced token issuers must hold 2% of average reserve assets.

Hong Kong will implement Basel Committee cryptoasset standards requiring authorized institutions to hold Tier 1 capital against crypto exposures :

- 1250% risk-weight for Group 2 cryptoassets (unbacked assets like Bitcoin).
- Tokenized securities on permissioned blockchains: Risk-weight based on underlying asset (not 250% as originally stated).
- Group 1 cryptoassets (tokenized traditional assets) receive risk weights based on the exposure.

12. AI, Data & Tokenized Finance

AI Integration with On-Chain Data for Portfolio Construction

The convergence of artificial intelligence and blockchain data is transforming how institutions generate alpha and manage risk. While specific adoption statistics from Q4 2025 are not yet publicly available in institutional reports, major financial institutions are actively integrating AI-driven analytics for portfolio decisions, with the tokenization market projected to grow from $4.13 billion in 2025 to $10.65 billion by 2029 according to Forbes.

On-Chain Signal Generation

Verified institutional applications include:

- AI-Powered Compliance Automation: TRM Labs demonstrates AI/Web3 adoption through blockchain platforms for real-time compliance automation and fraud detection.
- Tokenized Asset Management: J.P. Morgan Asset Management launched its first tokenized money market fund in December 2025, using AI-enhanced blockchain infrastructure for liquidity management.

Automated Compliance Monitoring

AI systems now continuously analyze:

- Smart contract code for vulnerabilities before deployment (AI-generated code grew 39% in 2025, though over 60% failed basic security benchmarks).
- Transaction pattern anomalies that indicate market manipulation, with academic research showing detection methods achieving 65-68% accuracy in initial studies.
- Governance proposal semantics to flag potential regulatory violations.

Credit Scoring for Tokenized Credit

For tokenized private credit portfolios, AI models ingest real-time on-chain repayment data, off-chain financial statements via oracle feeds, and macroeconomic indicators. This enables dynamic credit scoring and automated covenant triggers. J.P. Morgan's Kinexys Digital Assets platform (not "TCN") powers its tokenized money market fund collateralization through the My OnChain Net Yield Fund (MONY) launched December 15, 2025.

Data Integrity & Oracle Architecture

The integrity of AI outputs depends entirely on input data quality. The market has shifted toward hybrid

oracle models that combine:

- Chainlink's decentralized oracle networks for price feeds (securing $100+ billion across DeFi and tokenized assets as of October 2025).
- DTCC Smart NAV for fund net asset values, delivering tamper-evident data directly on-chain through a pilot with 10 major financial institutions including JPMorgan, BNY Mellon, and State Street, with SEC approval granted December 2025 to expand tokenization of DTC-custodied assets.
- Bank-run permissioned oracles for private credit data, where confidentiality is paramount—implemented through confidential transaction systems that use cryptographic commitments and private data collections to protect sensitive information while maintaining verifiability.

IOSCO emphasizes that DLT networks could increase dependencies among market participants, amplifying contagion risk if oracle systems fail or provide manipulated data, requiring robust risk management frameworks to address operational vulnerabilities and cyber threats. Institutional-grade implementations require:

- Multiple independent data sources per parameter to prevent single points of failure and reduce manipulation risk.
- Cryptographic proof of data origin (such as TLSNotary proofs) that enable verifiable data provenance through multi-party computation and selective disclosure mechanisms.
- Graceful fallback to traditional data feeds during oracle outages, with redundant infrastructure and circuit breakers to ensure continuous operation.

Risks and Opportunities of AI + Blockchain

Opportunities:

- Model risk governance improves as on-chain data provides immutable audit trails for AI decision-making, satisfying regulatory demands for explainability
- Decentralized AI marketplaces enable institutions to purchase inference services without vendor lock-in, reducing costs by 40%
- Automated ESG verification via tokenized impact metrics reduces reconciliation overhead by 800-1,000 person-hours per reporting cycle (per WEF research)

Risks:

- Data poisoning attacks targeting AI models increased 300% since 2022
- Model centralization paradox emerges as most "decentralized" AI runs on cloud infrastructure controlled by 3-5 major hyperscalers
- Regulatory uncertainty around AI-generated investment advice may trigger fiduciary liability under ERISA and MiFID II

Messari notes that "post-training, reinforcement learning, and test-time compute are pushing us into a new decentralized AI paradigm," but warns that crypto AI projects face significant challenges in achieving revenue generation.

AI for Investment Operations (2026) – Q&A with Federico Mele-Cormier

Q1: By 2026, what parts of investment operations will AI *actually* automate—not just hype?

AI will automate the heavy coordination work that humans dread: cross-platform reconciliation, continuous risk controls, exception-led reporting, and even semi-autonomous settlement checks. The narrative shifts from “better dashboards” to *AI that executes procedures end-to-end*, identifies issues, and drives resolution unless a genuine judgment call is needed. Ops teams will be measured on *exception rates*—not spreadsheets reviewed.

Q2: How will risk and reporting change in practice, beyond slick product demos?

The old cadence of monthly risk panels and quarterly LP reports dies. Agents will run *continuous control loops* across exposures, liquidity, stress results, and counterparty risks. Reports will be assembled on demand—triggered by thresholds, compliance queries, or audits—with AI producing context, rationale, and audit trails. Static reports become an artifact of the past; *dynamic, event-driven insight* becomes the standard.

Q3: Where do these systems still hit a wall, and why most AI pilots will fail?

The bottleneck isn’t intelligence; it’s semantics. Custodians, brokers, OMS/PMS, and accounting systems each speak different languages—data models, definitions, APIs, and mapping conventions diverge wildly. Without a **domain-specific ontology** acting as a translation layer, AI amplifies noise, not clarity. Most vendors will slap on “AI assistants” that regurgitate vendor-specific terms without true cross-system coherence. Only platforms with a unified financial ontology will scale.

Q4: What are your key predictions for AI in investment operations by 2026?

- First, COOs will run larger pilots—not isolated proofs of concept—but full workflow experiments, fueled by relentless cost pressure as ops costs outpace revenues and headcount budgets flatten.

- Second, conversational AI will become *table stakes* for any vendor that isn't willing to be dismissed as legacy tech with lipstick. But make no mistake: many embedded AI experiences from incumbents will be unimpressive glue code, not true operational transformation.
- Third, ops leaders will realize that *agentic, cross-system AI*—not point solutions or siloed assistants—is the only path to scale. AI that lives only within a single vendor or internal system will fail to deliver the value and cost savings agents promise.

Q5: A real example—what does this look like in action?

At a multi-strategy manager, AI agents reconcile books across custodians, administrators, OMS, and internal systems every reporting period. When a break occurs, the system identifies root causes—timing, mapping mismatches, API breaks—then proposes fixes or executes them under guardrails. What previously ate up analyst hours becomes a *continuous, automated control loop*, with humans stepping in only for genuine judgment calls.

13. Trading & Portfolio Construction

Institutional Crypto Allocation Framework

By Q4 2025, institutional allocation to digital assets reached a median of 1.8% among surveyed asset managers, with top quartile firms at 4.5%. The State Street October 2025 study reports that institutions currently hold ~7% in digital assets on average, targeting ~16% within three years. The allocation framework follows three pillars:

Risk Budgeting & Volatility Targeting

Institutions target crypto allocations based on portfolio risk contribution rather than capital weight. Common approaches include:

- Volatility parity: Limit crypto's contribution to overall portfolio volatility at 5-10% (e.g., 2% allocation to BTC with 60% volatility = 5% risk budget).
- Tail risk hedging: Allocate 0.5-1% to far-out-of-the-money BTC call options (strike $200K+, expiry June 2026) to hedge fiat debasement scenarios.
- Yield overlay: Replace 20-30% of fixed income exposure with tokenized money-market funds (e.g., BlackRock BUIDL, Franklin Templeton FOBXX) to capture 4.5-5.2% yields vs. 4.0% for traditional MMFs.

Derivatives-Based Execution

The CME Bitcoin futures market saw institutional participation reach record levels in 2025, with large open interest holders increasing 45% year-over-year to 1,014 holders in September. Key strategies include:

- Basis trading: Capture 8-12% annualized spreads between futures and spot ETPs.
- Covered calls: Generate 15-20% incremental yield on BTC holdings by selling 1.2x-1.3x delta calls (institutional implementation via CME options).
- Risk reversals: Buy downside puts (90% strike) and sell upside calls (120% strike) to finance protection.

Tokenized Instrument Integration

Tokenized assets now feature in institutional portfolios as:

- Liquidity buffers: Tokenized T-bills (BUIDL, $2.1B+ AUM) serve as high-quality liquid assets for meeting redemptions.
- Collateral optimization: On-chain repo via J.P. Morgan TCN reduces settlement from T+2 to T+0,

freeing up 15-20% in balance sheet efficiency.

- Private credit exposure: Tokenized direct lending funds targeting 8-12% IRR with 6-12 month durations (institutional pilots via tokenized fund structures).

Product Examples & Use Cases

Tokenized Fixed-Income Sleeve

A European asset manager allocates 3% ($150M) to a tokenized short-duration bond strategy:

- Composition: 50% tokenized U.S. T-bills (BUIDL), 30% tokenized European commercial paper, 20% tokenized private credit.
- Custody: Fireblocks MPC custody with insurance wrap.
- Yield: 5.8% net of fees vs. 4.2% for equivalent traditional strategy.
- Liquidity: Daily redemption with T+0 settlement via smart contract.

Hedged BTC Allocation

A pension fund implements liability-aware BTC exposure:

- Core holding: 1.5% allocation to spot BTC ETPs (IBIT, FBTC).
- Hedge overlay: Short CME Bitcoin futures equivalent to 0.75% notional, rolling quarterly.
- Tail protection: Long December 2026 $150K calls, 0.1% notional.
- Result: Reduces volatility from 45% to 32% while maintaining 80% of upside capture.

RWA Yield Ladder

A family office constructs 12-month yield ladder using tokenized assets:

- Months 1-3: Tokenized MMF (4.5% yield).
- Months 4-6: Private credit tokenized on Centrifuge (8.5% yield).
- Months 7-9: Tokenized invoice financing on Maple Finance (9.0% yield).
- Months 10-12: Tokenized real estate debt on RealT (11.0% yield).
- Diversification: 10 positions per bucket, max 5% per issuer.

Portfolio Construction in 24/7 Markets

The shift to 24/7 markets fundamentally changes how directional desks must think about risk. Traditional portfolio construction assumes discrete trading sessions, overnight gaps, and clear delineation between active and passive risk management periods. Crypto offers none of these conveniences. Markets run continuously, liquidity fragments across time zones, and counterparty risk never sleeps.

Where the Marginal Risk Capital Went

Before discussing portfolio construction, we need to acknowledge what's different about this cycle: the marginal retail risk capital that historically fueled altcoin seasons has migrated elsewhere. Bitcoin dominance climbed toward 64% in 2025—its highest level since April 2021—while the total altcoin market cap remains below prior cycle highs. Many altcoins are trading 90%+ below their all-time highs, and engagement metrics show speculative trading has declined by nearly half.

Where did the money go? Some flowed into Digital Asset Treasuries—the DAT 1.0 wave—with mixed results as the market works through that hangover. But the more significant story is the overwhelming migration of retail risk capital into prediction markets. Polymarket and Kalshi generated over $44 billion in combined trading volume in 2025, with monthly volumes topping $10 billion in November alone. Kalshi achieved $50 billion in annualized volume—up from just $300 million the prior year.

This isn't a sideshow—it's a structural reallocation. The same retail trader who might have levered into a mid-cap altcoin in 2021 is now placing event contracts on Fed decisions, NFL games, and crypto price targets. Prediction markets have become the new venue for speculative risk appetite, offering the gamified experience that drew retail to crypto in the first place, but with faster resolution and clearer odds. As one analyst noted, "They will fundamentally change how society processes information, turning passive news consumption into an active, incentivized pursuit."

For directional desks, this matters because it changes the liquidity profile of the assets we trade. Don't expect the broad-based altcoin rallies of prior cycles—capital has become far more selective, concentrating in Bitcoin, ETH, and a narrow set of high-utility tokens while the long tail struggles under supply pressure and token unlocks.

The Foundation: Yield as a Risk Buffer

Given this backdrop, Monarq focuses on building a base of stable, high-Sharpe yield as the foundation for the directional risk and convexity strategies. This isn't passive income—it's structural protection. When the core portfolio generates consistent yield, investors can afford to be more patient with directional bets and more aggressive with asymmetric setups.

Tokenized cash equivalents have become a core sleeve. BlackRock's BUIDL crossed $1B AUM in early 2025 and is now eligible as off-exchange collateral at major venues. These instruments deliver short-duration yield with daily liquidity, standardized reporting, and programmable settlement—allowing desks to post or recall collateral without disrupting treasury operations.

Sizing in a Fragmented Landscape

Cross-venue liquidity requires rethinking position sizing. A $50M position that might execute cleanly on a single CEX during US hours could face 50%+ slippage if forced to unwind across fragmented on-chain venues during Asian session lulls. October 2025's $19 billion liquidation cascade demonstrated this: order book depth evaporated across major venues when it was needed most.

Practical sizing rules: Scale position limits to worst-case liquidity conditions, not average. Build in execution buffers that assume 20–30% capacity degradation during stress. And maintain margin

reserves that contemplate simultaneous drawdowns across correlated positions—the correlation matrix tightens dramatically when markets sell off.

The Layering Approach

Monarq's portfolio construction for 2026 follows a deliberate layering philosophy designed to blend risk and return across market regimes. At the foundation sits stable, high-Sharpe yield generation—tokenized treasuries, DeFi lending, basis trades—strategies that compound quietly regardless of directional conviction. This layer isn't passive income; it's structural optionality. When the yield base is working, they have the patience to wait for asymmetric setups rather than forcing marginal trades.

Above that, they layer stat arb and market-neutral exposure—strategies that harvest inefficiencies without taking directional risk. Then comes the directional book: options structures, perp positioning, spot exposure sized for conviction. Finally, opportunistic allocations—private deals, DAT purchases at discounts—when dislocations create genuine asymmetry.

The key insight: they scale up the risk stack when opportunities present themselves and compress back to the yield generators when they don't. Each layer has a specific risk budget, expected return profile, and sizing constraint relative to the others. The discipline is knowing which layer to emphasize in a given environment—and having the infrastructure to execute across all of them.

That infrastructure is finally catching up. Prime brokerages now offer cross-margin capabilities spanning both centralized and decentralized perpetual venues, treating DEX liquidity as equivalent to traditional derivatives markets from a risk management perspective. Unified margin, consolidated reporting, single-point execution across fragmented liquidity—the operational friction that historically kept institutions on the sidelines is disappearing.

Execution Quality & Best Practices

Institutional execution now emphasizes:

- **Multi-venue aggregation:** Prime brokers like Coinbase Prime and Galaxy Digital provide access to multiple liquidity venues through single API connectivity. Coinbase Prime specifically offers "deep, aggregate liquidity" across "Coinbase Exchange and a curated set of third-party venues selected for market depth", with smart order routing that "finds the best prices" by scanning multiple exchanges. While specific venue counts and slippage reduction figures vary by implementation, multi-venue strategies consistently outperform single-venue execution by minimizing market impact on large trades.
- **TWAP/VWAP algorithms:** On-chain execution algorithms systematically break large institutional orders into smaller transactions executed over time. Time-Weighted Average Price (TWAP) and Volume-Weighted Average Price (VWAP) strategies are standard for minimizing market impact, though specific order sizes and transaction counts are tailored to market conditions and liquidity profiles. These algorithms help institutional traders "quietly execute large trades without alerting the market" and are particularly effective in low-liquidity

environments.

- **MEV protection:** Private mempool submissions and Flashbots auction participation are now fundamental protections. Flashbots Protect remains "the most widely used private RPC that shields transactions from public mempool sniping" in 2025, while additional layers include encrypted transaction flow and proposer-builder separation architectures. Coinbase Prime also integrates MEV-resistant routing as standard for spot trading.
- **Post-trade transparency:** Automated Transaction Cost Analysis (TCA) reporting shows execution performance versus Arrival Price, VWAP, and Implementation Shortfall (IS) benchmarks. Arrival price is defined as "the median 1-second mid-point top-of-book quoted price at the parent order submission time". Institutional platforms provide real-time slippage analysis against these benchmarks, with reporting that "sheds insights on the quality of execution" including venue analysis and comparative performance metrics.

Algorithmic Yield Pipelines: Designing Technology That Harvests Sustainable Returns Beyond Simple Beta

Introduction: Reframing Yield as an Engineered System

Yield is often framed as the outcome of a successful trade, an effective signal, or a market inefficiency captured at the right time. This framing implies that alpha is something found: discovered in markets, exploited while it persists, and abandoned once it decays. While this approach can succeed in narrow or short-lived contexts, it breaks down as a foundation for long-term performance. Strategies built around isolated signals or static assumptions tend to converge toward beta, degrade under competition, or fail outright as market regimes shift. In contrast, sustainable alpha is produced through repeatable processes that adapt to changing conditions, recycle infrastructure efficiently, and compound profits by design.

In an algorithmic yield pipeline, alpha is produced through a continuous process that converts market information into repeatable return streams across cycles. Signals occupy an upstream position in this process - they initiate decision-making, but they do not define the outcome on their own. Performance emerges from the way signals are engineered, filtered, executed, risk-managed, and redeployed within an infrastructure. Execution logic, risk controls, and capital allocation are shaped by the statistical properties of the signal, allowing the system to adapt as regimes shift. In this setting, infrastructure exists to support the signal's expected value, and yield accrues through process integrity and compounding design. Yield is not discovered; it is engineered.

Signal First, System Second: Two Paths to Strategy Design

There are two fundamentally different ways to design quantitative strategies.

The first approach begins with a signal - a trader or quantitative researcher identifies a statistically

profitable pattern and then designs a strategy around that signal. The expected value of the signal dictates the architecture of the system. This is historically how many smaller quantitative funds and proprietary trading groups have generated alpha.

The second approach reverses the process. Instead of starting with a signal, the trader or quantitative researcher begins with the desired properties of the system itself: expected return distribution, drawdown tolerance, turnover constraints, capacity limits, and capital efficiency. From these constraints, the system is reverse-engineered back to the types of signals that can support it. This is the dominant design mode at established trading firms, where scalability, robustness, and risk control are as important as raw alpha.

While both approaches exist, moving beyond beta requires prioritizing the first: starting from a demonstrably profitable signal and letting its expected value dictate system design. Isolated alpha, without infrastructure and process, quickly collapses. Sustainable alpha is produced when a high-expected-value signal is given priority, and the system architecture is then deliberately designed around it. The yield pipeline exists to formalize this relationship: signals are inputs, not the product. Execution systems should be recyclable between signal generating strategies. Designing infrastructure that allows plug and play signals sharpens the economics of building large scale trading infrastructure, and allows trading firms to scale their business.

Designing Factors and Moving Beyond Single-Signal Dependency

A factor is a repeatable rule that turns a market signal into an investable position. Its construction extends well beyond the selection of a technical indicator. Factor design requires explicit specification of the asset universe, signal transformations and normalization, rebalance cadence, holding horizon, and a realistic model of transaction costs, liquidity, and execution frictions. These implementation choices materially shape the factor's return distribution, capacity, and sensitivity to regime changes, and therefore determine whether the theoretical edge is economically realizable.

Single-factor strategies are structurally fragile because their performance is tightly coupled to the persistence of a single underlying market premise. When that premise degrades (through crowding, structural change, or regime transition) the strategy's return profile deteriorates rapidly. Yield pipelines mitigate this fragility by diversifying both across assets and across signals. At the portfolio level, cross-asset construction is essential: multi-asset momentum frameworks consistently outperform single-asset implementations because market turning points are rarely synchronized. Volatility scaling, risk-parity weighting, and optimization-based allocation across factor modules allow exposure to be dynamically redistributed, diluting tail risk without suppressing aggregate return potential.

Diversification across signal horizons and signal types further reduces model dependency. Combining short, medium, and long horizon momentum signals or even pairing momentum with complementary measures, such as carry or mean reversion, reduces signal-specific failure risk and stabilizes performance through regime transitions. In this framework, yield is not extracted from any individual

signal, but from the ensemble behavior of the system, whose aggregate properties are more stable than those of its constituent components.

Yield pipelines also favor recyclability. Systems that can be adapted across asset classes, instruments, or related market structures benefit from larger datasets and adaptive execution systems. Multi-asset momentum strategies, for example, almost always outperform single-asset versions precisely because they exploit structural similarities across markets rather than idiosyncratic behavior.

Generating Signals

Signal generation should be treated as a structured inference pipeline rather than a direct translation from indicator to trade. Quants usually begin by sourcing information from multiple layers of market data (whether that be price, volatility, liquidity, and order-flow) using traditional technical indicators only as raw inputs. These inputs then undergo feature engineering: normalization across regimes, detrending, volatility scaling, and nonlinear mathematical transformations that extract higher-order structure and reduce sensitivity to noise. Then they apply statistical and data-science techniques (such as classification, clustering, regression, and dimensionality reduction) to identify market states and return profiles. Signals are usually categorized by different characteristics, with each signal class mapped to a specific trade archetype and order construction logic. Signals are then filtered through regime, liquidity, and risk conditions to suppress low-quality or redundant expressions, ensuring that only signals with favorable expected value and executable characteristics propagate through the pipeline. In this framework, signal generation conditions when and how the system trades.

Backtesting & Forward Testing

Traditional backtesting is a cornerstone for strategy validation. However, results are often over-inflated and over-optimized. Many risk management rules appear robust in backtests despite being calibrated on a limited sample of stress events as market turning points are rare, making it difficult to validate the effectiveness of drawdown controls, stop mechanisms, and regime-dependent risk overlays using historical data alone. Distortions are further amplified by low-frequency sampling, which smooths pricing and materially understates tail risk by obscuring sharp reversals, liquidity gaps, and execution slippage. Together, these idealizations can produce strategies that perform well on paper but degrade rapidly when exposed to live market dynamics.

Models should be stress-tested not only on historical data but also on synthetic data designed to simulate extreme or rare conditions. When real-world data is limited, synthetic augmentation allows quants to explore how systems behave under anomalous regimes, revealing hidden vulnerabilities before they are encountered in live trading. To do this, quants can take market data from specific trading periods that move markets (for example Brexit, the 2020 COVID shock, the UK gilt crisis) and input them into less volatile periods or generate more volatile scenarios to run models through. Here they can see how outcomes change as market data changes. Synthetic augmentation allows systems to be exposed to extreme, rare, or structurally altered regimes that may not be present in observed

data, revealing failure modes that would otherwise remain hidden. When combined with large, multi-asset datasets, this approach helps distinguish genuine structural behavior from artifacts of regime-specific optimization.

Equally critical is forward testing under production-like conditions. Allowing a model to operate in a production-grade simulation that mirrors live deployment (using real-time market data, realistic execution logic, and enforced operational constraints) provides information that no historical backtest can surface. Extended forward-testing horizons, typically spanning multiple months, expose path dependency, execution slippage, latency sensitivity, and behavioral instabilities that only emerge through time and interaction with evolving market states. This phase is not intended to optimize performance, but to stress the system's integrity and allow the quant to see how the system performs on a day-to-day basis. Forward-tested strategies must demonstrate stability across changing liquidity conditions, volatility regimes, and execution frictions, while maintaining coherence with their expected return profile. It is better to fail in simulation than to fail in live trading.

Execution

In yield pipelines, execution is an active source of return rather than a passive cost center. Execution algorithms determine how signals are translated into market interaction, controlling trade participation rates, order slicing, and timing in response to prevailing liquidity and volatility conditions. Slippage reduction mechanisms (such as volatility-aware sizing, adaptive pacing, and liquidity-sensitive order routing) directly preserve signal edge by minimizing adverse price movement between decision and fill. Price improvement techniques extend beyond order placement and venue selection to include systematic reduction of the gap between simulated pricing assumptions of trade entry/exit and realized market prices of trade entry/exit. By continuously measuring and minimizing divergence between live execution outcomes and simulation models, execution systems create a feedback loop that improves both realized performance and research accuracy. This alignment allows backtests and forward simulations to converge toward economically realistic pricing, reducing model bias and preventing overestimation of signal quality. In this way, execution not only contributes incremental alpha at the point of trade, but also improves the integrity of the yield pipeline by feeding execution-level intelligence back into strategy development and validation. When integrated coherently, these execution components do not merely protect returns; they compound them, turning implementation quality into a measurable contributor to realized alpha within the yield pipeline.

Risk Systems as Alpha Preservation Infrastructure

Risk management is often framed as the opposite of alpha generation. In reality, it is the mechanism that preserves alpha long enough for compounding to occur. Poorly designed risk systems allow small structural weaknesses to compound into catastrophic losses, permanently impairing capital efficiency. For leveraged and volatile products, risk systems must extend beyond simple position limits or Value-at-Risk metrics. Liquidity risk, market anomalies, forced liquidation dynamics, and regime-specific stress scenarios must be explicitly modeled. Risk systems act as structural constraints

that shape the realizable return profile of the strategy.

Market Understanding and Strategy Cycles

A critical element of yield engineering is understanding where a strategy sits in its natural performance cycle. No strategy performs uniformly across all environments. Momentum and trend strategies, for example, tend to underperform during mean-reverting or stationary compressed market regimes where no persistent trend exists. While asset prices often exhibit long-term trending behavior, periods of low expected market returns can result in prolonged range-bound price action that erodes trend-following performance.

Recognizing these cycles is not a weakness; it is a design requirement. A yield pipeline must explicitly model when a strategy is expected to struggle and incorporate mechanisms to either reduce exposure or offset losses through diversification. This begins with clarity around what a model is actually detecting - whether trend persistence, volatility expansion, liquidity imbalances, or behavioral overreactions. Without this interpretability, regime shifts appear as unexplained drawdowns rather than predictable phases of a strategy's lifecycle.

At its core, every quantitative system consists of two primary engines: signal generation and execution. Depending on the strategy, these may be further decomposed into multiple interacting subsystems that collectively produce the final trading behavior. Crucially, each component contributes a measurable portion of expected return or risk mitigation. This decomposition makes it possible to identify precisely where an edge is created, where it decays, and where capital preservation mechanisms intentionally suppress alpha in order to protect the system as a whole.

Conclusion: Engineering Alpha as a Long-Term Process

The defining characteristic of a robust yield pipeline is not peak performance in any single regime, but resilience across many. By emphasizing traceability, recyclability, and lifecycle management, yield pipelines convert transient market structure into repeatable return streams. In doing so, they move decisively beyond beta exposure and beyond the notion that alpha must be rediscovered each cycle. The objective is not to predict markets more accurately, but to build systems that remain productive as markets change.

A signal-first approach anchors the system in genuine expected value, while modular infrastructure, adaptive execution, and dynamic risk systems determine whether that value can be realized and preserved. Backtesting and research establish hypotheses, but forward testing, execution realism, and continuous monitoring determine survivability. Execution and risk management are integral components that shape the realized return profile and govern how capital compounds through adverse conditions.

Over the long term, compounding is less a function of cleverness than of process integrity. Alpha that survives, adapts, and redeploys is alpha that was engineered with longevity in mind.

14. Legal & Tax Considerations

Cross-Jurisdiction Tax Treatment

The tokenization of real-world assets creates unprecedented tax complexity as traditional asset tax rules intersect with crypto-specific frameworks. The core principle emerging from IOSCO and national tax authorities is "same asset, same tax treatment"—but implementation varies dramatically.

United States

The IRS treats tokenized assets as "property" under Notice 2014-21, but tokenized securities are taxed as securities. Key considerations:

- Character: Tokenized stocks generate capital gains/losses; tokenized commodities may fall under Section 1256 (60/40 treatment) if traded on regulated venues as regulated futures contracts.
- Timing: Taxable events occur on-chain settlement (when taxpayer has "dominion and control"), which for smart-contract settlements may precede traditional T+2 settlement. The IRS requires wallet-by-wallet cost basis tracking under Rev. Proc. 2024-28.
- Withholding: Token transfers representing dividends trigger 30% withholding tax for non-US holders under chapter 3 withholding rules, unless treaty applies. Backup withholding of 24% applies when TINs are missing or invalid.
- Reporting: Form 1099-DA (Digital Assets) now requires reporting of tokenized security transactions, with gross proceeds reporting for 2025 transactions and cost basis tracking for assets acquired January 1, 2026 onwards.

European Union

MiCA's January 2025 implementation created harmonized treatment:

- VAT: Tokenized financial instruments are VAT-exempt under Article 135(1)(d) of VAT Directive, while utility tokens face standard VAT rates (typically 20%).
- Withholding Tax: Tokenized bond interest subject to EU Interest & Royalties Directive; specific rates depend on member state implementation and tax treaties.
- Fund Taxation: Tokenized UCITS funds benefit from same tax treatment as traditional funds; dividend distributions face 15-25% withholding depending on member state.
- Exit Tax: Token-to-token swaps treated as taxable disposals unless qualifying for specific national provisions; no universal "like-kind exchange" treatment exists under EU law.

United Kingdom

Post-Brexit divergence creates complexity:

- Stamp Duty: Tokenized shares attract 0.5% SDRT on issuance; tokenized debt exempt.
- Situs Rules: Tokenized real estate taxed based on underlying property location, not token domicile.
- DeFi Treatment: HMRC is consulting on "no gain, no loss" rules for DeFi lending and staking, potentially eliminating CGT at deposit/withdrawal stages. Current guidance treats most protocol interactions as taxable disposals.
- NFT Treatment: HMRC classifies tokens representing RWA rights based on their economic substance; pure crypto tokens as miscellaneous income.
- Cryptoasset Financial Promotions Regime: Approved communications required for all tokenized asset marketing, with FCA approval rates varying by application type.

Asia-Pacific

- Singapore: No capital gains tax on tokenized assets for individuals; payment tokens treated as money for GST purposes (exempt from GST when used for payment). Business trading profits subject to income tax up to 22%.
- Hong Kong: Tokenized securities taxed as securities; unbacked crypto as property with profits tax up to 16.5%.
- Australia: Tokenization does not change asset character; ATO treats crypto assets as property/CGT assets. SMSF trustees must ensure "arm's length" valuation via authorized oracles. DeFi transactions currently trigger multiple CGT events, though industry calls for reform.

Securities Law Classification Challenges

The fundamental friction point remains whether tokens constitute securities, commodities, or a new hybrid category. IOSCO's November 2025 report urges regulators to apply "same activities, same risks, same regulatory outcomes" but acknowledges legal uncertainty hinders scalability.

Tokenized Securities:
Tokens representing equity, bonds, or fund shares fall under existing securities laws. The FCA's Digital Securities Sandbox permits testing of DLT-based trading under modified FSMA rules. While specific firm numbers aren't publicly disclosed, the FCA reported accepting eight firms to pilot digital securities solutions as of mid-2025. Key requirements include:

- Prospectus approval for public offerings
- Admission and disclosure requirements (FCA CP25/41, published December 16, 2025)
- Market abuse surveillance across all trading venues

Tokenized Commodities:

Physical assets (gold, oil) tokenized on-chain generally retain commodity status. CFTC jurisdiction applies if traded on US venues; MiFID II if in the EU. The challenge emerges with fractional ownership—whether 1/1000th of a gold bar token constitutes a derivative.

Hybrid Tokens:

Many RWA tokens blend features (e.g., revenue participation + governance). The SEC's approach under potential 2026 crypto market structure legislation remains uncertain, with the Senate Banking Committee targeting early 2026 markup but no confirmed passage timeline. Discussions continue around creating a "regulated cryptoasset" category, but no official Q2 2026 enactment is confirmed.

Practical Fund Setup Checklist

Domicile Selection:

- Luxembourg RAIF: For tokenized alternative funds, 3-6 month setup timeframe, no CSSF approval required but must appoint an AIFM. Minimum capital requirement of EUR 1.25 million within 24 months of launch.
- Cayman Islands: For hedge fund structures, flexible tokenized share classes, 0% direct tax but CRS reporting required and economic substance requirements apply. New 2025 consultation proposals require tokenized funds to appoint Cayman-licensed administrators, undergo annual IT security audits, and implement segregated custody with secure wallet management.
- Delaware Series LLC: For tokenized asset pools, each series segregated, but securities law uncertainty persists for non-US investors as the SEC treats most tokenized assets as securities requiring registration or exemption (Reg D, Reg S). Series LLCs offer liability segregation but lack comprehensive federal tax guidance from the IRS.

Custodian Agreements:

Must specify legal ownership of tokenized assets (beneficial vs. legal title). Define slashing risk allocation for staked assets. Require proof-of-reserves attestations (frequency varies by arrangement, typically quarterly to annual). Include smart contract failure indemnification (coverage amounts vary by policy, not standardized)—institutional policies typically range from $5M to $25M but are not fixed at $50M.

Smart-Contract Legal Wrappers:

- SPV structure: Token represents beneficial interest in bankruptcy-remote vehicle
- Trust structure: Token as trust interest with regulated trustee
- Direct tokenization: Token as digital bearer instrument (high legal risk, not recommended for

institutions)

Institutional examples: BlackRock's BUIDL fund and Apollo's ACRED use SPV structures with regulated custody and transfer restrictions.

Tax Reporting Infrastructure:

Built-in tracking of token cost basis across wrapped versions (IRS now mandates wallet-by-wallet tracking, disallowing universal aggregation). Automated generation of 1099-DA (U.S., effective 2025 tax year), DAC6 (EU) supplemented by DAC8 crypto-asset rules (effective January 2026), and CRS reports. Real-time withholding tax calculation for tokenized interest/dividends. Integration with traditional tax engines (Apex, Citco) is standard practice for institutional funds.

15. Scenarios & Investment Implications

Scenario Framework

Based on Grayscale, CoinShares, and BlackRock analyses, we model three distinct pathways for 2026, each with differentiated market structure implications. The forward-looking vista through 2030 will be defined by monetary-policy trajectories, capital-reallocation mechanics and on-chain market-structure metrics.

Monetary-Policy Scenarios & Digital-Asset Beta

Institutional digital-asset management is deeply sensitive to the cost of capital. As of mid-December 2025, the U.S. money-market fund complex stood at approximately US$7.67 trillion for the week ended December 17, 2025, per Investment Company Institute —a vast reservoir of highly liquid capital vulnerable to yield compression. We identify two plausible policy-rate scenarios:

- **Scenario A — Pre-emptive Easing**: Central banks cut rates in anticipation of inflation deceleration, compressing short-term yields toward 2-3%. A 1% rotation from the MMF base would channel ~US$76.7 billion into digital-asset products; a 2% rotation would deliver ~US$153.4 billion. Such flows would deepen secondary-market liquidity and accelerate infrastructure investment.
- **Scenario B — Reactive Easing**: Banks delay cuts until inflation is subdued, keeping yields elevated. Capital migration might remain below 0.5% of the MMF base, limiting flows to tens of billions. Adoption would remain gradual, driven by operational efficiency rather than yield-seeking.

The critical variable is infrastructure readiness. Unless custody, orchestration and analytics layers are sufficiently mature, even willing capital may remain idle. The sequencing of policy-driven capital activation and infrastructure activation dictates the slope of the adoption curve.

Scenario 1: Rapid Institutional Adoption (35% Probability)

Triggers:

- Bipartisan U.S. crypto market structure legislation passes by Q2 2026 with clear custody and staking rules
- Fed cuts rates 4-5 times as Kevin Hassett becomes Chair, boosting risk asset appetite
- Major wirehouses (Morgan Stanley, UBS) open Bitcoin ETF allocations to all wealth clients
- Hong Kong and Singapore finalize Basel III-equivalent prudential standards, enabling bank direct participation

Market Structure:

- Crypto market cap surges from $3T to $4.5-5T by year-end
- Bitcoin reaches $180,000-200,000; Ethereum $8,000-10,000
- Tokenized asset AUM grows 10x to $3.5 trillion (from current $331B)
- Stablecoin supply expands to $2 trillion as corporate treasuries adopt USDC/USDT for working capital
- On-chain spot volume exceeds CME futures volume for first time

Product Rollouts:

- BlackRock launches tokenized S&P 500 fund on Ethereum; Fidelity follows with tokenized bond ladder
- Major banks (JPM, Goldman) offer tokenized deposits yielding 5.5-6%
- First regulated on-chain repo platform processes $1T+ daily volume

Near-Term Milestones to Monitor:

- U.S. House vote on Market Structure Act (expected March 2026)
- FCA final rules publication (post-February 2026 consultation deadline)
- BlackRock tokenized equity fund announcement
- Hong Kong bank crypto license grants

Scenario 2: Gradual Integration (50% Probability)

Triggers:

- U.S. legislation passes in narrow form, leaving custody definitions ambiguous
- Fed pauses cuts mid-year due to inflation resurgence; "higher for longer" scenario
- Institutional adoption continues but at measured pace; wealth platforms conduct 12-18 month due diligence cycles
- MiCA implementation faces technical delays in passporting across EU member states

Market Structure:

- Market cap grows steadily to $3.5-4T
- Bitcoin trades $110,000-140,000 range; Ethereum $3,500-4,500
- Tokenized assets reach $800B-1T AUM (2.5-3x growth)
- Stablecoins stabilize at $1.2-1.5T supply
- Hybrid finance emerges: traditional finance uses private blockchains for settlement while public chains handle retail

Product Rollouts:

- Tokenized funds grow selectively; focus on money-market and short-duration credit
- Banks offer limited tokenized deposit pilots to corporate clients only
- Prediction markets gain regulatory clarity but limited institutional participation

Near-Term Milestones:

- FCA consultation responses analysis (March 2026)
- MiCA Level 3 measures publication (April 2026)
- Major 401(k) provider crypto allocation decision (June 2026)
- Quarterly earnings calls from BlackRock, Fidelity on crypto AUM growth

Scenario 3: Fragmented Regulation (15% Probability)

Triggers:

- U.S. legislation fails due to partisan gridlock; enforcement-driven policy continues
- Major crypto exchange faces solvency crisis due to unregulated leverage
- EU-UK regulatory divergence widens; passporting breaks down
- China accelerates CBDC while restricting stablecoin usage, creating payment system fragmentation

Market Structure:

- Market cap stagnates at $2.5-3T; volatility remains elevated (60-80% annualized)
- Bitcoin oscillates $70,000-90,000; Ethereum $2,000-3,000
- Tokenized assets grow modestly to $400-500B as regulatory uncertainty deters issuance
- Stablecoin supply shrinks to $150B as banks exit due to unclear capital treatment
- Liquidity fragments across jurisdiction-specific walled gardens

Product Rollouts:

- Only fully regulated tokenized MMFs continue; experimental products halted
- Banks withdraw from crypto custody services
- Institutional focus shifts to offshore venues with lighter regulation

Near-Term Milestones:

- U.S. legislative vote failure (negative signal)
- Major bank crypto exit announcement
- IOSCO enforcement action against unregulated tokenized product
- FATF gray-listing of jurisdiction with weak crypto controls

Market-Size Projection & Growth Scenarios (2025–2030)

Scenario	2025 Baseline	2030 Projection	CAGR	Key Assumptions
Bull Case	$3.5B	$20-25B	42%	Rapid infrastructure maturity, full policy easing, $150B+ capital rotation
Base Case	$3.5B	$12.8B	30%	Steady tokenization, moderate yield compression, operational scaling
Conservative Case	$3.5B	$8-10B	18%	Infrastructure friction, regulatory delays, slow capital activation

These figures refer specifically to the institutional digital-asset management market—encompassing custody/management of tokenized funds, yield-stack products and orchestration platforms. The base-case aligns with size targets set earlier in this report and reflects a plausible path if current momentum continues without major disruptions. If digital-asset management captures just 0.5% of the global open-ended fund industry (approximately US$74 trillion in 2025), potential AUM could reach ~US$370 billion by 2030.

Ethereum Restaking, Bitcoin Dominance & Alt-Liquidity Rotation

Institutional asset-allocation patterns are evolving from simple exposure to major crypto assets toward integrated digital-asset management strategies. Survey data show that 73% of institutions hold altcoins beyond Bitcoin and Ethereum, and DeFi engagement is expected to triple from 24% to 75% within two years, as documented by both the EY-Parthenon Institutional Investor Digital Assets Survey and AMPLYFI research. Within that mix, Bitcoin continues to serve as the core digital-asset beta vehicle, but yield and real-world-asset exposure are increasingly important.

The role of Ethereum restaking is especially notable: as institutional solutions enable staking and

restaking yield at scale, Ethereum and derivative yield stacks become part of an institutional yield-oriented layer rather than pure store-of-value. Corporate treasuries and spot ETFs now control nearly 11% of circulating ETH supply, with staking yields averaging 2.81% annually as of October 2025. Thus the digital-asset management framework now includes three layers:

1. **Core-beta layer:** Bitcoin and large-cap digital assets for market exposure and liquidity. Bitcoin ownership by institutions remains heavily retail-driven (only ~8% held by institutions), but institutional adoption is accelerating through regulated ETPs and treasury strategies. State Street research shows average institutional digital asset allocation at 7% of AUM, projected to rise to 16% within three years.
2. **Yield-stack layer:** Ethereum restaking, tokenized credit/fixed-income, DeFi liquidity-provider yields enabled via orchestration and analytics. The percentage of institutions engaged with DeFi is set to triple from 24% to 75% by 2027, with primary interest in derivatives (40%), staking (38%), and lending (34%). Liquid staking tokens now represent over 14% of all staked SOL, with institutional-grade services like Marinade Select surpassing 3.1M SOL in TVL by November 2025.
3. **Tokenized RWA layer:** Real-world assets that are digital-native, fractionalized and integrated into institutional portfolios. The tokenized real-world asset market has grown 223% to $35.66 billion in 2025, with 57% of institutions planning tokenized asset investments by 2026, focusing on alternative funds (47%), commodities (44%), and equities (42%). Deutsche Bank's Project DAMA demonstrates a three-layered blockchain architecture for institutional tokenization platforms.

As institutional capital rotates into digital assets, portfolio design shifts from simply "hold BTC/Ether" to structured digital-asset-management vehicles combining yield, tokenization and orchestration. Operational sophistication (custody, real-time settlement, proof-of-reserve) becomes a key differentiator. Leading institutional custody providers now offer bankruptcy-remote structures, real-time proof-of-reserve attestations, and integrated DeFi yield farming custody. The Lynq network launched in July 2025 as the first real-time, interest-bearing settlement network for institutional digital assets, providing on-chain transparency and proof-of-reserves. SEC Commissioner Peirce has emphasized that real-time proof-of-reserves and blockchain transparency will enable investors to verify custodian assets continuously.

On-Chain & Market-Structure Metrics to Track

Monitoring the adoption curve requires looking beyond raw asset flows to structural metrics that signal ecosystem maturity:

- **Settlement velocity and transaction scale**: Higher throughput and lower settlement latency reduce fund-accounting drag, custody reconciliation cost and collateral drag, enabling intra-day NAV calculations. These efficiency gains are driving institutional adoption as blockchain infrastructure matures.
- **Tokenized Real-World Asset issuance volumes**: Industry data from RWA.xyz shows the RWA

tokenization market reached approximately US$35 billion as of October 2025, representing a 308% increase over the prior three years. Standard Chartered projects the RWA market cap could hit US$2 trillion by 2028. These projections are based on current growth trajectories and accelerating institutional adoption.

- **Institutional allocation metrics**: Current surveys show 86% of institutions have exposure or plan allocations to digital assets in 2025, according to State Street's Digital Asset Survey. However, conversion of intent into live exposures is the final step in capital activation.
- **Liquidity and tradability of tokenized instruments**: Despite $35 billion in RWA tokens, tradability remains low with limited active addresses, thin secondary markets and structural bottlenecks. Research from arXiv analyzing 2025 market data documents that most RWA tokens exhibit low trading volumes, long holding periods, and limited investor participation. For example, BlackRock's BUIDL token has only 85 holders with 30 truly active addresses monthly, while tokenized real estate on platforms like RealT changes hands just once per year on average. Real-time insights on token-RWA liquidity, tradability and secondary-market depth are critical to institutional uptake.

Strategic Implications for Institutional Stakeholders

Custodians and Infrastructure Providers:

As digital-asset management scales, custodians and platforms that combine custody, orchestration, analytics and multi-rail settlement become central hubs. Margin pools may shift from pure custody fees toward orchestration premium, analytics services and yield-stack enablement. However, competition and commoditization risk mean providers must differentiate via service depth, interoperability and compliance rigor. Leading custodians such as BNY Mellon now offer integrated digital asset custody alongside traditional assets, with $55.8 trillion in assets under custody and real-time blockchain analytics. Infrastructure providers like Chainlink have evolved into full-stack institutional platforms securing over $100 billion in value and enabling $26 trillion in cumulative transaction volume through services including proof-of-reserve, cross-chain interoperability, and compliance monitoring.

Asset Managers:

Traditional asset managers face a strategic decision: integrate digital-asset management into multi-asset platforms or outsource. Those that embed tokenized funds, digital-asset yield-stacks and real-time analytics will capture first-mover advantage among institutional clients. Firms such as BlackRock's digital division are already signaling this shift by building end-to-end capabilities, with its BUIDL tokenized treasury fund reaching $2.38 billion in assets under management within fifteen months of launch. Franklin Templeton's BENJI platform pioneered tokenized mutual funds in 2021 and now manages $775 million across eight blockchains with institutional-grade infrastructure.

As BlackRock CEO Larry Fink stated in 2025:

"Every stock, every bond, every fund—every asset—can be tokenized. If they are, it will revolutionize investing".

Corporate Treasuries:

Treasury-management frameworks will increasingly treat tokenized cash-equivalents, stablecoins and tokenized T-bills as part of core liquidity management. The ability to plug tokenized yield-stacks into settlement infrastructure offers corporates an alternative to traditional MMFs and short-term instruments, reducing cost and improving visibility. The tokenized Treasury and money market fund market exceeded $8 billion in assets under management by December 2025, with yields ranging between 4.5% and 5.2% annually. Stablecoins now serve as critical liquidity instruments, with major banks like J.P. Morgan processing over $1 billion daily via JPM Coin and Citi launching 24/7 tokenized deposit services for corporate fund transfers.

Market-Infrastructure Vendors and Analytics Firms:

Growth in digital-asset management will drive demand for chain-analytics, proof-of-reserve platforms, smart-contract-risk scoring, real-time risk-marking and cross-rail settlement-visibility tools. Firms that provide these services to custodians, asset managers and treasuries will benefit from rising complexity and regulatory demands. Chainlink's Proof of Reserve technology is now live with Crypto Finance (Deutsche Börse Group) to enable real-time verification of assets backing exchange-traded products. The Canton Network processes over $4 trillion in tokenized assets monthly, including $2 trillion in U.S. Treasury repo transactions. These platforms provide institutional-grade transparency that meets ISO 27001 certification and SOC 2 Type 1 attestation standards.

Tokenization Service Providers:

Given RWA tokenization growth projections, tokenization platforms, origination networks and asset-servicing firms must prepare for institutional-scale issuance. Standard Chartered Bank projects the tokenized real-world asset market will surge from $35 billion to $2 trillion by 2028—a 5,600% increase—driven primarily by tokenized money market funds ($750 billion) and listed equities ($750 billion). They face a window of opportunity to build standards, governance protocols and secondary-market infrastructure ahead of mass-market adoption. The World Economic Forum affirms that 2025 is a pivotal year for blockchain integration into traditional finance, with major financial market infrastructures like DTCC, Clearstream, and Euroclear launching tokenization pilot projects to establish interoperable standards.

Leading Indicators to Monitor (Next 12–18 Months)

Key metrics to watch:

- Institutional digital-asset AUM reported by custody platforms and asset managers has reached concrete milestones: tokenized U.S. Treasuries alone hit $7.5 billion AUM in Q2 2025, with BlackRock's BUIDL fund at $2.88 billion, while the total tokenized asset market crossed $25 billion and is projected to reach $1.24 trillion by year-end.
- Token-RWA issuance volumes and secondary-market tradability metrics show exponential growth, expanding from $59.7 million in 2018 to $300 billion by October 2025—a 502,000% increase. Secondary market liquidity remains developing, with tokenized equities showing daily liquidity below 7% of outstanding tokens and DEX trading volume for major products like tokenized gold exceeding $22 million annually.
- Settlement-latency improvements and custody-orchestration standard adoption are advancing through industry collaboration, exemplified by the DTCC Smart NAV pilot with Chainlink. Strategic priorities now focus on interoperability and open standards, with 63% of custodians already offering tokenized asset services and another 30% planning implementation within two years.
- Institutional portfolio-allocation behaviors converting declared intent into live exposures demonstrate accelerating adoption: institutional investors accounted for nearly 70% of the asset tokenization market in 2024, with 53% of asset managers now engaged in private equity tokenization and 15% currently offering tokenized fund products (41% plan launches). High-net-worth investors are expected to allocate 8.6% of portfolios to tokenized assets by 2026.
- Licensing counts in major jurisdictions coupled with proof-of-reserve transparency metrics reflect maturing compliance: platforms like Ondo Finance and Securitize operate SEC-registered infrastructure with broker-dealer and transfer agent licenses, while 85% of token issuers now integrate legal wrappers, KYC/AML, custody oversight, and audits. Regulatory sandboxes for tokenization increased 38% globally in 2025, and real-time proof of reserves has become a standard expectation.

From 2025 onward, digital-asset management edges into the core fiduciary stack. Institutions that align infrastructure, governance and allocation frameworks early will capture disproportionate optionality as the ecosystem becomes a standard institutional line-item rather than a fringe pilot.

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