

GWM Monthly Newsletter

Gauthier Wealth Management



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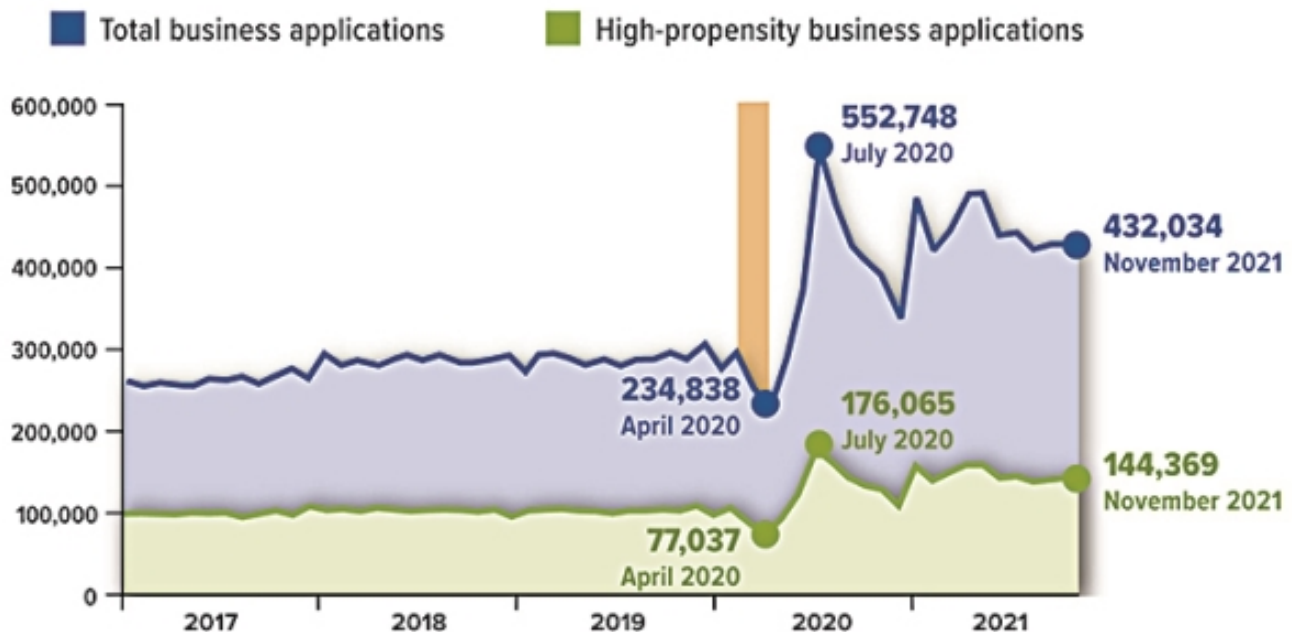
Happy February! The market is off to a rough start in 2022, but U.S. leading economic indicators (LEI) continue to show a strong economy. Eight of the ten components of the LEI expanded in December and we expect real economic growth to be 3.5 percent for all of 2022. In January, the economy added 467,000 jobs while the number of workers unemployed for more than six months declined from 2 million to 1.7 million. Unemployment increased from 3.9 percent to 4.0 percent, but this is because the estimated number of workers entering the job market exceeded the estimated number hired. All of this is good news. So while it can be unnerving to go through market volatility, it is a positive sign that the economy is continuing to grow so strongly.

All the Best, Jon Gauthier, President, GWM

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New Businesses May Be Good News for the Economy

After taking a nosedive at the start of the pandemic recession (gold shaded area), business applications rose sharply, peaking in July 2020. Applications have fallen somewhat since then but are still up approximately 84% from their April 2020 low. Businesses that are likely to hire employees — called high-propensity businesses — make up approximately one-third of total applications. Businesses with payroll are considered more likely to power job growth and economic recovery.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 (data for the period January 2017 to November 2021)

When Two Goals Collide: Balancing College and Retirement Preparations

You've been doing the right thing financially for many years, saving for your child's education and your own retirement. Yet now, as both goals loom in the years ahead, you may wonder what else you can do to help your child (or children) receive a quality education without compromising your own retirement goals.

Knowledge Is Power

Start by reviewing the financial aid process and understanding how financial need is calculated. Colleges and the federal government use different formulas to determine need by looking at a family's income (the most important factor), assets, and other household information.

A few key points:

- Generally, the federal government assesses up to 47% of parent income (adjusted gross income plus untaxed income/benefits minus certain deductions) and 50% of a student's income over a certain amount. Parent assets are counted at 5.6%; student assets are counted at 20%.¹
- Certain parent assets are excluded, including home equity and retirement assets.
- The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) relies on your income from two years prior (the "base year") and current assets for its analysis. For example, for the 2023-2024 school year, the FAFSA will consider your 2021 income tax record and your assets at the time of application.

Strategies to Consider

Financial aid takes two forms: need-based aid and merit-based aid. Although middle- and higher-income families typically have a tougher time receiving need-based aid, there are some ways to reposition your finances to potentially enhance eligibility:

- Time the receipt of discretionary income to avoid the base year.
- Have your child limit his or her income during the base year to the excludable amount.
- Use countable assets (such as cash savings) to increase investments in your college and retirement savings accounts and pay down consumer debt and your mortgage.
- Make a major purchase, such as a car or home improvement, to reduce liquid assets.

Many colleges use merit-aid packages to attract students, regardless of financial need. As your family

explores colleges in the years ahead, be sure to investigate merit-aid opportunities as well. A net price calculator, available on every college website, can give you an estimate of how much financial aid (merit- and need-based) your child might receive at a particular college.

Don't Lose Sight of Retirement

What if you've done all you can and still face a sizable gap between how much college will cost and how much you have saved? To help your child graduate with as little debt as possible, you might consider borrowing or withdrawing funds from your retirement savings. Though tempting, this is not an ideal move. While your child can borrow to finance his or her education, you generally cannot take a loan to fund your retirement. If you make retirement savings and debt reduction (including a mortgage) a priority now, you may be better positioned to help your child repay any loans later.

Some Parents Use Retirement Funds to Pay for College

| | Retirement Savings Withdrawal | | Retirement Account Loan | |
|--|-------------------------------|---------|-------------------------|---------|
| | 2020 | 2021 | 2020 | 2021 |
| Percentage of families using each source | 14% | 16% | 7% | 6% |
| Average amount | \$3,143 | \$3,633 | \$2,806 | \$3,631 |

Source: Sallie Mae, 2021

Consider speaking with a financial professional about how these strategies may help you balance these two challenging and important goals. There is no assurance that working with a financial professional will improve investment results.

Withdrawals from traditional IRAs and most employer-sponsored retirement plans are taxed as ordinary income and may be subject to a 10% penalty tax if taken prior to age 59½, unless an exception applies. (IRA withdrawals used for qualified higher-education purposes avoid the early-withdrawal penalty.)

1) College Savings Plan Network, 2021

Going Public: How Are Direct Listings Different from IPOs?

An initial public offering (IPO) is the first public sale of stock shares by a private company. IPOs are important to the financial markets because they help fuel the growth of innovative young companies and add new stocks to the pool of potential investment opportunities.

When a company files for an IPO, new shares are created, underwritten by a bank, and sold to the public. But that's not the only way for a company's stock to become publicly traded. When a company uses a direct listing, typically only existing shares are sold to the public on a stock exchange — no new shares are issued, and no underwriters are involved.

There were more U.S. IPOs in the first half of 2021 than there were in all of 2020, which was also a record year.¹ The number of direct listings has ticked up, too, but there were just three in 2020 and six in 2021.²

Going public is a fraught process that few companies dare to navigate on their own. Even so, several well-known companies have sparked media coverage and investor curiosity when they chose to bypass the traditional IPO process.

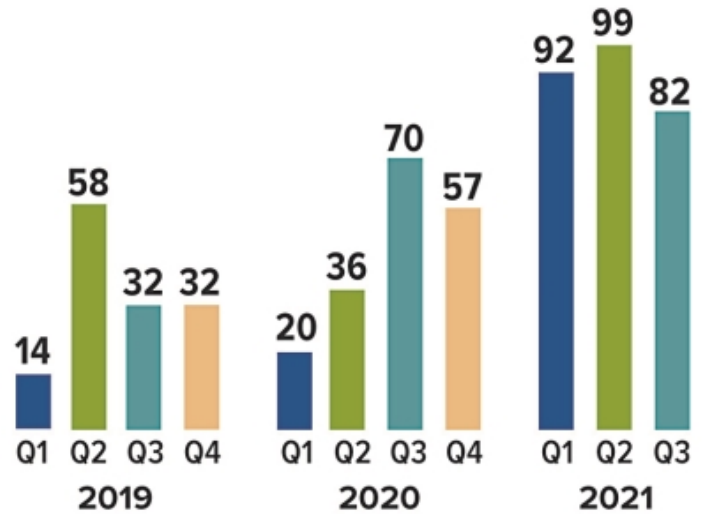
Two Roads, One Less Traveled

The path a company takes to the stock market generally depends on its business goals. Companies that pursue a traditional IPO often want to raise as much money as possible for expansion purposes. Direct listings, on the other hand, give company founders, employees, and early investors a way to cash out some of their equity without diluting the value of the company's stock.

The underwriters that facilitate the IPO process typically organize a "roadshow" to market the stock and gauge the interest of institutional investors. They also guide the company through regulatory requirements, help set the initial offer price, and may guarantee the sale of a specified number of shares at the offering price. IPOs usually have a three- to six-month lockup period, which is an agreement with underwriters that prevents employees and other early investors from immediately selling their shares. Keeping insider shares off the market can help quell market volatility in the early days of trading.

A company may be able to make its stock market debut faster and at a much lower cost with a direct listing, and there is no lockup period. But going public without underwriting support can also be risky. The supply of shares becoming available for sale is undefined, and the demand for those shares can be difficult to predict, which could result in insufficient liquidity.

Number of Traditional U.S. IPOs



Source: PwC, 2021

Investor Access

One catch associated with IPOs is that many investors who want to buy shares at the offering price don't have the opportunity to do so. Moreover, those who buy the stock on the first day of trading often miss out on much of the sought-after "pop," because a large part of the appreciation can take place between its pricing and the first stock trade. With a direct listing, everyone has access to the stock at the same time, but this also means share prices can be more volatile after trading begins.

In fact, some investors who rush to buy highly anticipated IPOs or directly listed stocks on the first day might pay inflated prices, because that's when media coverage, public interest, and demand may be greatest. Share prices could drop in the weeks following a large first-day gain as the excitement dies down and fundamental performance measures such as revenues and profits take center stage.

The return and principal value of all stocks fluctuate with changes in market conditions. Shares, when sold, may be worth more or less than their original cost. Investments offering the potential for higher rates of return also involve a higher degree of risk.

1) Reuters, June 15, 2021

2) Warrington College of Business, University of Florida, 2022

Plan Ahead to Help Ease the Burden of Tax Season

Most U.S. taxpayers "completely agree" (68%) or "mostly agree" (26%) that paying their fair share of taxes is a civic duty.¹ However, no one wants to pay more than his or her fair share. To help avoid doing so, consider addressing some important priorities before you begin filling out your tax forms.

Here are some steps that might help reduce stress when preparing your return.

Create an online account with the IRS. In addition to making it easier to review important tax information from previous years, an online IRS account provides a secure platform for reviewing the total amount you owe, making payments, responding to third-party tax information authorization requests, and more. Your balance is typically updated each night, and the service is available seven days a week, which makes it a good resource if you don't have easy access to hard copies of previous returns. Visit [irs.gov](https://www.irs.gov) for more information.



The IRS issued more than 125 million individual income tax refunds in 2020; the average amount was nearly \$2,600.

Source: Internal Revenue Service, 2021

Organize paperwork for all sources of income.

Completing a tax return can be stressful enough without having to search for supporting documents, so at the outset gather records of all taxable income you earned during the year. If you are unsure whether income is taxable, review IRS Publication 525, *Taxable and Nontaxable Income*. For example, if you received income in the form of a valid check during 2021 but did not cash the check until 2022, you must still include it on your 2021 return. Other forms of taxable income include workplace bonuses and awards (e.g., goods, services, and vacation trips) and winnings from lotteries and raffles. The fair market value of any "found property" you acquired is also taxable. Found property includes anything you found and kept that did not belong to you but is now in your "undisputed possession."

Determine whether you qualify for disaster relief. If your home or business is in an area that was affected by a natural disaster, the IRS may extend deadlines for filing returns and paying taxes. To determine whether you qualify, consult the Tax Relief in Disaster Situations page on the IRS website.

Filing your taxes doesn't need to be an annual exercise in frustration. This year, consider simplifying your financial life by doing some basic pre-planning. Before you take any specific action, be sure to consult with your tax professional.

1) Internal Revenue Service, 2021

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