

## Tax Planning Strategies for 2026 and Beyond

For investors, long-term success is not solely determined by total returns, but by how much of those returns are retained after taxes. As portfolios grow in complexity, tax drag can quietly erode their performance over time. Effective tax planning is therefore not just about avoidance, but about structuring investments in a way that is aligned with tax efficiency, timing, and an investor's long-term financial goals.

Tax planning is different than tax preparation. Tax preparation is backward-looking and it focuses on accurately reporting what already happened to comply with the law and file your return. Tax planning is forward-looking and it involves proactively structuring decisions throughout the year to minimize your tax liability and improve your after-tax outcomes. In short, preparation records history, while planning helps shape it.

Below are some widely used and practical tax reduction strategies that investors and financial advisors commonly implement to improve after-tax outcomes.

### Asset Location Strategy

One of the most underutilized yet powerful tax strategies is **asset location**, which should not be confused with asset allocation.

The concept is simple: place investments in the most tax-efficient account type based on how they are taxed.

- **Taxable accounts:** Can be best for long-term capital gains or tax efficient investments (e.g., index funds, ETFs)
- **Tax-deferred accounts (401(k), Traditional IRA):** Can be best for high-income-producing assets (e.g., bonds, REITs)
- **Roth accounts:** Can be best for high-growth assets (future tax-free growth)

### Why this strategy works:

Different investment incomes are taxed differently. Interest, dividends, and capital gains each receive distinct treatment. By strategically placing assets in the appropriate accounts, investors can reduce annual tax leakage and improve compounding efficiency.

### Key benefits:

Over time, proper asset location can meaningfully increase your after-tax portfolio value without changing overall investment risk or return profile.

## Tax-loss Harvesting

**Tax-loss harvesting** involves selling investments that have declined in value to realize a capital loss, which can then be used to offset capital gains and sometimes ordinary income.

### How it works:

- Sell a security at a loss
- Replace it with a similar (but not “substantially identical”) investment to maintain market exposure
- Use realized losses to offset gains elsewhere in the portfolio

If losses exceed gains, up to \$3,000 per year can be used to offset ordinary income, with additional losses carried forward indefinitely.

### Why this matters:

This strategy is particularly effective in volatile markets. Even diversified, well-constructed portfolios will experience periodic losses in certain holdings or sectors.

### Key benefit:

Tax-loss harvesting can be used to turn market volatility into a tax planning opportunity.



## Municipal Bonds for Tax-Free Income

**Municipal bonds (“Munis”)** are issued by state and local governments and are often exempt from federal income tax. In some cases, they may also be exempt from state and local taxes if the investor resides in the issuing state.

### How they work:

Investors receive interest payments that are generally free from federal taxation, which can make the effective yield more attractive on an after-tax basis. This strategy can be especially attractive for high-income earners.

### When this makes sense:

Municipal bonds are most beneficial when:

- An investor is in a higher tax bracket
- Fixed income is needed for stability or cash flow
- Taxable bond yields are less competitive after taxes

### **Key benefit:**

They provide predictable income while reducing taxable interest exposure, improving after-tax yield efficiency.

## **Strategic Use of Retirement Accounts & Roth Conversions**

Tax-advantaged retirement accounts remain one of the most effective long-term tax reduction tools available.

### **Traditional accounts (i.e. 401(k), IRA):**

- Contributions may be tax-deductible
- Growth is tax-deferred
- Withdrawals are taxed as ordinary income

### **Roth accounts:**

- New contributions are made with after-tax dollars
- Growth and qualified withdrawals are tax-free

### **Roth conversion strategy:**

A Roth conversion involves moving funds from a Traditional IRA into a Roth IRA, paying taxes in the current year in exchange for future tax-free growth.

### **Why investors use Roth conversions:**

- Reduces future Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs)
- Locks in tax rates during lower-income years (retirement, market downturns, business transitions)
- Creates tax diversification in retirement income planning

### **Key benefit:**

This strategy gives investors control over when taxes are paid, which can be just as important as how much tax is paid.

## **Charitable Giving and Donor-Advised Funds (DAFs)**

Charitable strategies allow investors to align philanthropic goals with tax efficiency.

### **Direct charitable giving:**

Donations to qualified charities can provide tax deductions if you itemize.

### **Donor-Advised Funds (DAFs):**

A DAF could allow an investor to:

- Contribute cash or appreciated securities
- Receive an immediate tax deduction
- Invest funds tax-free within the DAF

- Distribute grants to charities over time

### *Why using appreciated securities matters:*

Donating appreciated assets (instead of cash) allows investors to avoid capital gains taxes while still receiving a charitable deduction for the full fair market value.

### *Key benefit:*

DAFs can be particularly powerful in high income years, during liquidity events, or when selling a concentrated stock position. They can allow investors to reduce taxable income while supporting their long-term charitable giving goals.

### **Conclusion**

Tax efficiency is not achieved through a single tactic, but through a coordinated set of strategies that align investments, timing, and structure. Asset location reduces ongoing tax drag. Tax-loss harvesting monetizes volatility. Municipal bonds provide tax-advantaged income. Retirement account strategies manage lifetime tax exposure. Charitable giving structures convert philanthropic intent into tax efficiency.

For investors, the cumulative effect of these strategies can be substantial over time and can often represent the difference between simply growing wealth and maximizing after-tax wealth. In modern portfolio management, tax planning is no longer optional; it is an integral component of performance.

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Donors are urged to consult their attorneys, accountants or tax advisors with respect to questions relating to the deductibility of various types of contributions to a Donor-Advised Fund for federal and state tax purposes.

Investments in municipal securities may not be appropriate for all investors, particularly those who do not stand to benefit from the tax status of the investment. Municipal bond interest is not subject to federal income tax but may be subject to AMT, state or local taxes.

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