

A photograph of two business professionals, a man and a woman, looking at their smartphones. The man is on the left, wearing a light green polo shirt and an orange tie. The woman is on the right, wearing a light blue button-down shirt. They are both holding their phones and looking at the screens. The background is a solid green color.

Part Five

TIPS FOR COMBATING DISINFORMATION

CLIMATE FINANCE ACTION



Tips for Combating Disinformation

This section aims to offer simple, concrete steps you can take to push back against disinformation and avoid the traps of helping dealers of disinformation spread their narrative.



First things first:

What is the “anti-ESG backlash”?

Across the US, hyper-conservative groups are intensifying their attacks on financial institutions for taking into account environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors, also known as "responsible investing," as significant material risks for public state pension funds. These attacks on responsible investing are a thinly veiled push to prevent any accountability for or loss of the fossil fuel industry's outsized power and systemic racism.

This resistance emerged out of fear some special interest groups had of the success that sustainable investing was generating— and is driven by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), Texas Public Policy Foundation, and Heritage Foundation.

These groups may be recognized for their longstanding attacks on public pensions, climate change solutions, and broader issues related to democracy, health, and safety, which continue to shape this narrative of opposition.

These powerful specialist interest groups, influenced and bankrolled by the fossil fuel industry, are looking to ban access to essential financial information needed to make sustainable investments and stymie responsible investment practices. Restricting pension funds from key ESG risk data is especially dangerous and irresponsible, given their need to ensure long-term returns to protect the retirement savings for generations of workers.

Simply put, when pensions can't use the tools they need to understand and manage an array of risks and opportunities in their investment decisions, workers' retirement savings get hurt. And that is precisely what we've seen in many states like Louisiana and Texas from enacting these legal restrictions— to the tune of billions lost in investment returns and retirement funds.

WHAT DOES DISINFORMATION HAVE TO DO WITH THE BACKLASH?

Despite lacking credibility and proving costly to investors, the anti-ESG narrative is still gaining momentum. This is part of their broader strategy, which includes supporting far-right lawmakers to advocate for restrictive bills and running an aggressive disinformation campaign. The primary objective of such a campaign is not to establish credibility or win debates but to spread deceit.

Let's break down the fundamental goals for dealers of disinformation:

DISTORT

Make up fake facts and sell them as a new false narrative to drown out facts they don't like or benefit from.

DISTRACT

Create and spread false narratives– or draw false comparisons to unrelated, unsavory topics– to keep people's attention away from facts.

DISMISS

Encourage people to wave off or distrust an entity or accurate point they want to go away.

DISMAY

Inundate people with exhausting content and behaviors to scare them or get them to feel so deflated they check out.

THREE PITFALLS TO AVOID – AND WAYS TO EFFECTIVELY COMBAT DISINFORMATION

Disinformation is designed to be tricky, so it is very common to make honest mistakes when it comes to interacting with disinformation. Here are three of the biggest mistakes to avoid, grounded in social science research– and what you can do to successfully protect against disinformation:

1 Helping them get more attention.

Whether on social media, in group chats and list-serves, or in any conversations aimed to spread ideas, anytime you share the content and messaging that disinformation dealers create, you inadvertently do PR for them. Remember that they are not looking to be right. They want more play for their narrative to help distort and distract– don't do their work for them!

2 Giving up control of the narrative.

By constantly reacting to disinformation dealers' messaging, outreach, and events, you keep the conversation on their terms and with their words. In this case, the best defense is offense.

3 Derailing you from making progress or reaching key audiences.

A real win for disinformation dealers is to wear you down or distract you from actions that could overpower them and their agenda. Don't let them get that win by falling down their rabbit holes or engaging in behaviors that we know don't move people or advance progress.

DO'S AND DON'TS TO EFFECTIVELY COMBAT DISINFORMATION

Here's a comprehensive list of practical do's and don'ts to empower you to effectively combat disinformation.

DON'T...

- Share or amplify the exact storylines, framing, or materials dealers have created in any way, even if you are trying to debunk or correct it. That includes sharing, commenting, or reacting to it online, as that gives it more play due to social media's algorithms that boost its visibility.
- Use terminology that dealers fabricated and are peddling themselves, or share articles and public pieces where the majority of the framing is in their wheelhouse.
- Create materials or outreach focused on responding to their claims. That includes “busting myths” in a way that restates dealers’ points. (When a lie is repeated over and over, people begin to accept it as a credible claim simply because it is more familiar*. “Myth busting” that restates the lies also simply gives those lies more airtime and chances to be memorable.)
- Focus most of your energy on convincing people who have fallen into the disinformation trap that they are wrong—or on mocking or dunking on the disinformation and its dealers.
- Present facts and figures to counter a lie without any leading framing on the positive vision or actionable stories people can connect with.

DO...

- Don't engage with it. Instead, share the factual narrative of responsible investing with a vision for the wins gained by pursuing it all on its own!
- Report it as disinformation.
- Share encouraging tips and tools for people to better spot, respond to, and protect themselves against disinformation. Personally reach out to a friend or colleague amplifying disinformation to help them take a different course of action.
- When exposing the actors and their dangerous goals and harms of the backlash, make sure your content is free of any of their main points or terminology—and centers the positive story of the vision it seeks to disrupt, with actionable steps to make that possible.
- Find and amplify credible messengers with accurate stories to reach broader audiences
- Research and tailor your messaging to specific audiences who are movable, using points, questions, and stories that connect with their experiences and expressed values (See “Building a Story That Builds Power worksheet” for support.)

DEVELOP AND SHARE A NARRATIVE THAT TELLS THE ASPIRATIONAL, ACCURATE STORY OF RESPONSIBLE INVESTING. THAT INCLUDES:



Using terms that are accessible, easy to remember & repeat, and voids jargon (such as “responsible investing” instead of “ESG”.)



Making and sharing content that shows people what they can do to advance responsible investing and highlights what’s to gain if we do.



Share success stories from responsible investing thus far that celebrate benefits and showcase actionable solutions. Link those to core values people can connect with.



Offering interesting facts, with stories, that reinforce a productive narrative. (Try not to just use facts and figures. Rather, have them shine as supporting actors to the lead: the compelling story of why responsible investing is the positive path forward.)

If you do have relationships where you see a genuine opening to help someone question the disinformation or explore a different [accurate] take, the following two phrases can help guide a constructive conversation—“connect before correct” and “change moves at the speed of trust.”

These speak to the enabling conditions for people to be more open to change, where they feel heard and understood, and believe you value them and have authentic intention.

[**Combatting Disinformation with The Four D’s – Center for Academic Innovation*](#)

[**Attempts at Debunking "Fake News" about Epidemics Might Do More Harm Than Good | Scientific American*](#)

TIPS FOR COMBATING DISINFORMATION

Key Takeaways:

- We can better avoid the pitfalls intentionally set by disinformation dealers once we understand that the goal of disinformation campaigns around responsible investing is *not* to win a credible argument-- but rather to distract and deflate energies that could go toward positive change.
- Check out some of the "do's" and "don'ts" to help protect you from being stuck in "reaction mode" or accidentally giving disinformation more air time-- and instead, focus the majority of your energy on driving an exciting, truthful narrative that takes over attention.



Thank you for exploring Tips for Combating Disinformation, Part Five of **Investing in Our Future: A Guide for Climate-Conscious Pension Strategies**.

What to do Next:

CONTINUE LEARNING:

Part Six: Additional Resources

BOOK A CONSULTATION:

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Climate Finance Action (CFA) is a women-led, 501(C)3 non-profit organization equipping stakeholders and decision-makers to leverage the transformative power of publicly-held capital for real-world climate solutions to ensure a just transition to an inclusive economy in favor of people and the planet.