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Hot Topics For Family Offices In 2026

By **Sara Wells, Jon English and Rahul Patel** (January 9, 2026, 5:15 PM EST)

Family offices enter 2026 facing a convergence of policy, market and technology developments that directly affect governance, tax efficiency and long-term allocation decisions.

Sara Wells

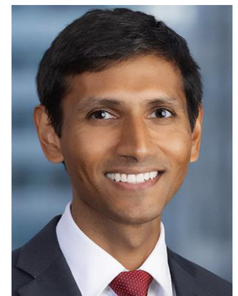
The One Big Beautiful Bill Act's federal estate and gift tax updates will shape near-term transfer strategies and multigenerational planning; the rapid institutionalization of private credit continues to recalibrate risk and return, liquidity, and structuring across the capital stack; and digital assets — including crypto and stablecoins — now implicate custody, compliance, valuation and payment rails in ways that can no longer be relegated to "emerging" status.

Jon English

Together, these themes demand coordinated action across legal, tax, investment and operational teams to protect optionality, mitigate downside and position families to capitalize on 2026's changing landscape.

2026 Federal Estate and Gift Tax

Due to the enactment of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, the federal gift, estate and generation-skipping exemption amount increased to a new, permanent $15 million exemption as of Jan. 1, allowing married couples to transfer a total of $30 million without paying any federal estate or gift tax. The annual gift tax exclusion remains at $19,000 per recipient in 2026, the same as in 2025.


Rahul Patel

Family offices and wealth managers should advise their clients that the increased exemption allows a married couple that has already reached their lifetime gift limit to give away an additional $2.02 million starting in 2026 and single clients an additional $1.01 million.

Note that the exemption will continue to be indexed annually for inflation, and unlike prior legislation that increased exemption amounts, the act includes no sunset provisions, meaning that there is no need to rush to take advantage of the new, higher amount.

However, because Congress could amend or repeal any provision of the act at any time in the future, it may be prudent for clients to consider gifts to use their increased exemption during this administration, to take advantage of the current high exemption levels and move assets, and their future appreciation,

outside of their taxable estates.

Importantly, the act has no bearing on the states that impose state-level estate taxes. Therefore, family offices and wealth managers with clients living in or owning property in one of the 12 states that impose state-level estate taxes, or Washington, D.C., should continue to plan for these taxes at death.

Private Credit

Despite economic headwinds and questions about private credit underwriting following several high-profile sponsor-backed bankruptcies, private credit — particularly senior direct lending — remains attractive to many investors.

The asset class has often outperformed other leveraged finance products while maintaining comparatively low default rates. Family offices are allocating more capital to private credit and are increasingly seeking ways to hold loans directly, either as lenders of record under the loan agreement or as participants in existing loans.

That shift brings family offices closer to the credit risk of individual borrowers and heightens the importance of the underlying loan documentation. Beyond confirming that the documents reflect the commercial deal, family offices must understand the provisions that restrict leakage of cash, collateral or other assets out of the credit group, as well as protections against aggressive liability management transactions. These terms also help safeguard minority lenders from value-transfer deals implemented by majority lenders and the borrower.

When a family office is a lender of record, it has direct voting rights on consents, amendments and waivers, which are often determined by holders of a majority of the loans and commitments. A family office is likely to be a minority lender in a loan transaction, so sacred rights are of particular importance.

Key sacred rights should require each affected lender's consent, including changes to maturity, interest or fees, principal reductions, payment waterfall, or releases of substantially all collateral or guarantees, among other rights.

Minority lenders should also focus on protections against uptiering or priming transactions that create structurally or contractually senior debt without their consent and, where feasible, negotiate to permanently be "required lenders."

Family offices that instead invest via participations purchase economic interests from an existing lender under a separate participation agreement. Because participants are not parties to the loan agreement, they generally lack direct voting rights and must negotiate carefully tailored consent rights with the selling lender, often limited to a subset of sacred rights.

Other critical participation terms include funding mechanics for unfunded commitments, allocation of fees and expenses, and elevation rights that allow the participant, upon certain trigger events, to become the lender of record.

For family offices, deeper involvement in private credit can be compelling, but only if paired with disciplined review and negotiation of loan and participation terms that protect downside risk and minority positions.

Digital Assets

Digital assets enter 2026 with significantly more institutional acceptance. The federal government's shift to a more proactive and engaging stance with the industry has encouraged many traditional financial institutions to launch or expand digital-asset services, tokenized products and blockchain-based settlement rails. The result is that family offices now have better access to digital assets from many of the same parties they have a long history of engaging with.

This more mature phase of the crypto cycle has also led some to recalibrate expectations. While volatility may still be a factor, some family offices now approach digital assets with more measured assumptions about returns, and market participants debate whether certain assets function as an inflation hedge or a risk-on asset.

Regardless of where that debate lands, family offices should ensure that their existing structure, governance frameworks and risk management align with those investment decisions.

In determining the role that digital assets may have in a portfolio, it may be prudent to differentiate among use cases, as 2026 is expected to see continued progress on a variety of fronts, including payments, infrastructure, privacy, decentralized finance, decentralized compute, tokenization and stablecoins.

Many view each of these as representing a different component of a broader risk framework that goes beyond direct token holdings and instead resembles a more traditional investment in operating companies and technology infrastructure.

It was the crypto-related operating companies leading the charge on some of these technologies that helped reopen the IPO window in 2025, and there is likely further activity ahead for the picks-and-shovels companies in 2026.

As regulators continue to provide clarity and younger principals with a greater interest in digital assets assume greater influence over investment decisions, allocations in the space are likely to continue to increase.

If the question for family offices in 2025 was whether and how to allocate to digital assets — directly or through funds — then in 2026 the priority will be to ensure that they stay informed about the flurry of regulatory developments in the space.

Each development presents its own opportunities and risks, and family offices will need to confirm that investment policies and governing procedures are calibrated to properly address questions such as custody and key management, trading authority, valuation methodologies, tax and information reporting, and sanctions and anti-money laundering, so that they ultimately support rather than complicate long-term family objectives.

Conclusion

The throughline for 2026 is disciplined readiness: Translate the One Big Beautiful Bill's estate and gift tax changes into executable plans; refine private credit exposure with robust underwriting, liquidity tiers and governance; and institutionalize digital-asset policies around custody, controls and regulatory alignment.

Family offices that monitor rulemaking and market signals, refresh structures and documentation proactively, and pressure-test assumptions with counsel and advisers will preserve flexibility and enhance outcomes. In a year defined by policy shifts and platform maturation, staying informed — and acting deliberately — will be the decisive edge.

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