The Year-End 2026 Checklist

The investment and tax strategies worth considering, before the holidays eat the calendar and December 31 closes the door on 2026.

Dec 31, 2026
Deadline for most moves: 401(k) deferrals, conversions, RMDs, gifts, loss harvesting.

Jan 15, 2027
Q4 estimated tax payment due. Check withholding now to avoid a surprise.

Apr 15, 2027
Last day for 2026 IRA and HSA contributions.

01 Max out tax-advantaged accounts

Payroll deferrals must come from 2026 paychecks. Only a handful are left.

- [ ] 401(k)/403(b)/457: **$24,500**, plus **$8,000** at 50+ or **$11,250** at ages 60–63. It's important to understand your deferral rates before year end!
- [ ] **New for 2026:** earned over $150K in FICA wages from your employer in 2025? Catch-ups must now go in as Roth. This is crucial.
- [ ] IRA **$7,500** (+$1,100 at 50+) and HSA **$4,400 / $8,750** (+$1,000 at 55+).
- [ ] Self-employed: SEP-IRA up to **$72,000**; open a Solo 401(k) by Dec 31 to defer for 2026.

02 Harvest losses & rebalance

Turn this year's laggards into tax savings.

- [ ] Realize losses to offset gains plus up to **$3,000** of ordinary income. Be careful about buying back stock within 30 days (wash-sale rule).
- [ ] Rebalance to target, starting inside IRAs where trades don't trigger tax.
- [ ] Check funds for year-end capital gain distributions before buying in taxable accounts. These are some of the "ghost fees" that people forget about.

03 Look at the Roth conversion window

Pay tax at today's rate; grow tax-free from here.

- [ ] A lower-income year (retirement, sabbatical, business loss) could be used as the time to fill your current bracket.
- [ ] Conversions must be done by Dec 31 and can't be undone. Model the tax bill first.
- [ ] Pay the tax from outside funds so the full amount keeps compounding.

04 Take RMDs, and give with QCDs

A missed RMD can cost a 25% penalty. Plan carefully!

- [ ] RMDs are due Dec 31. Turned 73 this year? The first can wait until Apr 1, 2027, but then two land in one tax year. This is why it's important to plan.
- [ ] At 70½+, you can give up to **$111,000** straight from your IRA to charity. It counts toward your RMD and stays out of income.
- [ ] QCDs can't go to donor-advised funds or private foundations.

Continued: real estate & Opportunity Zones, charitable giving, estate moves

05

Real estate, 1031 exchange strategy, & alternatives

The biggest 2026 deadline most investors aren't watching.

- [ ] **OZ gains come due:** gains deferred under the original Opportunity Zone program are taxed **Dec 31, 2026**. Set aside cash, harvest losses to offset, and ask whether a valuation could lower the gain.
- [ ] **100% bonus depreciation** is permanent for property acquired after Jan 19, 2025. A cost segregation study can front-load deductions.
- [ ] Selling? Map your 1031 exchange 45-and 180-day deadlines around the holidays. This can be difficult to achieve if important legal and tax advisors are out of the office. Plan now, and be ahead of the curve.
- [ ] Idle retirement cash? A self-directed IRA can hold private real estate and real estate funds. This is an opportunity that takes careful planning.

06

Rethink charitable giving

New 2026 rules change the math.

- [ ] Itemizers now deduct only gifts above **0.5% of AGI**: the first $2,500 is lost on a $500K AGI. We recommend speaking with someone who can explain this further, as there are various important details involved,
- [ ] In the 37% bracket? The tax value of itemized deductions is capped at **35%**.
- [ ] Don't itemize? You can now deduct up to **$1,000** (**$2,000** joint) of cash gifts.
- [ ] Consider combining several years of giving into one via a donor-advised fund, and give appreciated stock, not cash.

07

Estate & family gifting

Annual exclusions reset on Jan 1. Use them or lose them.

- [ ] Consider giving up to **$19,000** per recipient (**$38,000** per couple) by Dec 31 without touching your lifetime exemption.
- [ ] The estate and gift exemption is now **$15M per person** (**$30M** per couple), permanent and inflation-indexed.
- [ ] Superfund a 529 with five years of gifts at once, up to **$95,000** per child.

08

Deductions, SALT & business owners

Time payments for the higher-tax year.

- [ ] The SALT cap is **$40,400** but phases down above **$505K** MAGI. Time property tax payments accordingly.
- [ ] Standard deduction: **$16,100** single, **$32,200** joint. Compare before prepaying anything.
- [ ] Owners: weigh a pass-through entity tax (PTET) election and pull equipment or expenses into 2026.

Let's dial-in your plan before the busy holiday rush.

A 20-minute year-end review covers every item here and leaves you with a prioritized action list. Please visit our website for our full list of disclosures and important information.

Jonathan M. Hahn
Managing Director, NorthStar Capital
jonathan.hahn@northstarcapitalinc.com
603-630-9863
www.northstarcapitalinc.com