The Callan Periodic Table of Investment Returns conveys the strong case for diversification across asset classes (stocks vs. bonds), capitalizations (large vs. small), and equity markets (U.S. vs. global ex-U.S.). The Table highlights the uncertainty inherent in all capital markets. Rankings change every year. Also noteworthy is the difference between absolute and relative performance, as returns for the top-performing asset class span a wide range over the past 20 years.
The Callan Periodic Table of Investment Returns 2002–2021

Callan’s Periodic Table of Investment Returns depicts annual returns for 8 asset classes and cash equivalents, ranked from best to worst performance for each calendar year. The asset classes are color-coded to enable easy tracking over time. We describe the well-known, industry-standard market indices that we use as proxies for each asset class below.

- **Large Cap Equity (S&P 500)** measures the performance of large capitalization U.S. stocks. The S&P 500 is a market-value-weighted index of 500 stocks. The weightings make each company’s influence on the Index performance directly proportional to that company’s market value.

- **Small Cap Equity (Russell 2000)** measures the performance of small capitalization U.S. stocks. The Russell 2000 is a market-value-weighted index of the 2,000 smallest stocks in the broad-market Russell 3000 Index.

- **Developed ex-U.S. Equity (MSCI World ex USA)** is an index that is designed to measure the performance of large and mid-cap equities in developed markets in Europe, the Middle East, the Pacific region, and Canada.

- **Emerging Market Equity (MSCI Emerging Markets)** is an index that is designed to measure the performance of equity markets in 25 emerging countries around the world.

- **U.S. Fixed Income (Bloomberg US Aggregate Bond Index)** includes U.S. government, corporate, and mortgage-backed securities with maturities of at least one year.

- **High Yield (Bloomberg High Yield Bond Index)** measures the market of USD-denominated, non-investment grade, fixed-rate, taxable corporate bonds. Securities are classified as high yield if the middle rating of Moody’s, Fitch, and S&P is Ba1/BB+/BB+ or below, excluding emerging market debt.

- **Global ex-U.S. Fixed Income (Bloomberg Global Aggregate ex US Bond Index)** is an unmanaged index that is comprised of several other Bloomberg indices that measure the fixed income performance of regions around the world, excluding the U.S.

- **Real Estate (FTSE EPRA Nareit Developed REIT Index)** is designed to measure the stock performance of companies engaged in specific real estate activities in the North American, European, and Asian real estate markets.

- **Cash Equivalent (90-day T-bill)** is a short-term debt obligation backed by the Treasury Department of the U.S. government.