

Case Study

Strengthening Oversight at a \$1.8 Billion University Endowment with On-Demand Independent Peer Benchmarking

The Challenge

Moving beyond broad surveys and industry-standard benchmarking.



About the institution

- University of Tennessee's Endowment
- **Assets:** \$1.8 billion
- **Asset mix:** public, private, hedge strategies, real assets
- Investment staff with consultant support
- **Chief Investment Officer:** Rip Mecherle

Background

Despite using several data sources, Rip found that his ability to compare the University of Tennessee's portfolio with other universities was limited.

- The National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) Study provided broad cohort data, but grouping the University of Tennessee into the \$1 billion+ category (along with larger universities) did not provide an accurate apples-to-apples comparison. Because the survey is conducted annually, the data was often outdated when he needed it.
- Consultants could provide detailed peer data, but nothing from the OCIO universe.
- A performance benchmarking platform from another provider offered additional data, but it lacked flexibility and was difficult to use.

Prior to adding OCIO Analytics to the mix, Rip shared that gathering the information he needed was challenging and usually omitted key data critical to benchmarking the university's investment function.



"Without independent and comparable context, you're forced to rely on broad surveys and conduct an RFI every three years. It was difficult to provide ongoing oversight and make sense of it."

— Rip Mecherle, CIO, The University of Tennessee System

Solution

Rip started using OCIO Analytics in 2021. Over the past five years, he has gained the ability to:

- Customize the benchmark to the **\$500 million-\$2 billion** universe to gain a clearer view of how key peers manage their allocations.
- Access **updated quarterly data whenever he needed it**.
- Analyze **fee levels against the OCIO industry**.
- Generate **customized charts and graphs**, incorporating the University of Tennessee's portfolio—all with limited training required.

Most importantly, the platform provides **independent data on OCIO-managed portfolios**, giving him an additional reference point alongside information from other providers.

"I want to keep an eye on how they are doing from an asset allocation and performance standpoint – and on fees. What are we paying? How does that compare? This allows me to ask more intelligent questions," says Rip.

The Result

Since partnering with OCIO Analytics, Rip has integrated the platform into his ongoing operational and governance process. He uses it to:

- Improve responsiveness to questions from board members and donors.
- Monitor allocation decisions and performance outcomes.
- Inform internal resource planning and budgeting.
- Integrate peer benchmarking into planning discussions with senior leaders.

Access to continuously updated, customizable data has shifted benchmarking from an annual exercise to a standing governance tool.

"OCIO Analytics gives you an eye into what a typical asset allocator in your peer group is doing and how you compare," says Rip.

**"Are we getting good managers?
Have we allocated assets appropriately?
Are we missing anything?"**

The Takeaway

For mid-sized endowments with internal investment teams, independent peer benchmarking can improve governance. As boards, donors, and oversight committees expect greater transparency and cost accountability, dynamic peer analytics allow CIOs to shift from reactive reporting to proactive oversight.

Take the Next Step

Learn how an on-demand independent benchmarking platform can strengthen your institution's oversight.



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