

RESPONSIBLE CEO OF THE YEAR:  
ESG Leadership

**JEFFREY W. ECKEL**

President and Chief Executive Officer  
*Hannon Armstrong*



“People are here making a difference. There’s a humility that comes with the chance to do what we love and make a difference, and people are grateful for that. We’re not beating our chests—we’re actually doing this work.”

Jeff Eckel launched his personal and professional mission more than 35 years ago. He had read the 1971 book by Frances Moore Lappé, *A Diet for a Small Planet*, which in part resonated with Eckel for its description of the global meat industry as a major contributor to food scarcity worldwide. What struck Eckel most about Lappé’s book, however, was its point that the food industry was highly inefficient.

“I’ve since done business all over the world, and that notion of efficiency has never left me,” Eckel told CR Magazine.

Eckel has been eating a sustainable diet ever since, part of his lifelong commitment to the environment that also includes working to eliminate emissions by implementing technology and business innovations within the power generation sector. Now, this vegetarian leads a company with a \$1.6 billion market evaluation. Since its 2013 IPO, Hannon Armstrong had an average annual total return of about 22 percent, outperforming the S&P 500.

After what he described as an early “checkered” career, Eckel joined Hannon Armstrong in 1984. He soon had a leading role in financing some of the earliest large-scale solar projects—notably California Solar Energy Generating Systems, which includes Ivanpah, the world’s second largest solar-thermal power generation facility.

During his interview with CR Magazine, Eckel was clear about where he stands on climate change, but he also emphasized how his company focuses on projects that make both environmental and financial sense. “You can’t make a difference if you don’t stay in business,” Eckel told us. “Hannon Armstrong will earn better risk-adjusted returns by investing on the right side of the climate change line.”

Eckel’s vision and longstanding commitment to climate action make him one of the leading executive voices on environmental, social and governance (ESG) decision-making today. It’s easy to focus on the “E” (environment), based on Hannon Armstrong’s book of investments that decrease carbon emissions or boost climate change resilience, but Eckel stands out as a leader on social and governance factors, too.

When it comes to community engagement, Hannon Armstrong, under Eckel’s leadership, is an example of how a company can leverage its core expertise for good. The company’s employee volunteerism efforts, for example, include the installation of rooftop solar for low-income households.

Those same employees also have a say in how Hannon Armstrong runs its sustainability programs. Eckel regularly holds employee meetings on ESG, along with the company’s overall performance. And those employees reflect various perspectives and points of view: The company’s ongoing commitment to diversity is reflected in its workforce, which is about 40 percent female and 20 percent people of color.

Eckel’s emphasis on sustainability is also reflected in how investors and analysts view the company, with a solid “A” for how the company approaches the “G” (governance) in ESG. Approximately 25 percent of Hannon Armstrong’s shares are held by sustainable investors. S&P and Fitch have responded in kind, as both rating agencies give the company’s bonds high marks for its low leverage, long-term customer relationships and diversified portfolio.

The culture at Hannon Armstrong, one that takes ESG to heart, inspires Eckel day after day.