

AGF U.S. Small-Mid Cap Growth Equity Strategy

Strategy Commentary

First Quarter, 2025

Strategy Facts

Strategy category:

U.S. Small/Mid Cap Equity

Benchmark Index:

S&P MidCap 400 Index

Date of inception:

June 1993

Investment style:

Fundamental/bottom-up growth

Portfolio Managers

AGF Investments Inc.
Mike Archibald
Auritro Kundu

Market Overview

The first quarter of 2025 was a challenging period for global equities. Concerns surrounding the U.S. administration's policy agenda and the potential economic impact of trade tensions weighed heavily on corporate and consumer sentiment. The emergence of China's low-cost Artificial Intelligence (AI) model DeepSeek disrupted the technology sector, while February's momentum unwind and the looming threat of heavy tariffs from the U.S., largely eroded investor confidence during the period. While the U.S. Federal Reserve (Fed) held interest rates steady during the quarter, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine exacerbated volatility in commodity markets, particularly in energy.

U.S. equity markets started the year positively, driven by optimism surrounding President Donald Trump's "America First" policy. However, this momentum faltered in late January as DeepSeek, a Chinese AI startup, raised fears of market disruption by offering high-quality content at a significantly lower cost. February's momentum unwind, which resulted in a significant 3-day sell-off for global equities, further deepened market concerns and the situation worsened as trade tensions escalated, with President Trump announcing 25% tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada, followed by proposals for tariffs on steel, aluminum, and automobiles, further stoking uncertainty.

The global equity market's risk-off sentiment was further driven by mixed economic data. While U.S. GDP growth remained resilient, the yield curve inversion raised alarm about a potential economic slowdown, signalling that the equity market was pricing in greater risks of recession in the near term. The Fed chose to postpone policy rate changes to later in the year, considering slowing economic growth and sticky inflation. Fed chair Jerome Powell made it clear the Fed would let the macroeconomic effects of tariffs become evident before any policy rate changes are implemented.

Sector performance during the quarter reflected these broader U.S. economic headwinds. Energy, Health Care and Consumer Staples were the top-performing sectors benefitting from the volatility in commodity markets and defensive characteristics, while Consumer Discretionary, Information Technology and Communication Services were the weakest sectors. Additionally, large cap stocks outperformed small cap stocks and value stocks led growth stocks.

Strategy Overview

For the quarter ended March 31, 2025, AGF U.S. Small-Mid Cap Strategy underperformed the benchmark, the S&P MidCap 400 Index. Security selection in Consumer Discretionary, Industrials, Information Technology and Financials detracted the most from performance. This was partially offset by the Strategy's cash position, which averaged 6.1% during the quarter, and contributed the most to performance. Security selection in Energy also contributed to performance, as did security selection and an overweight allocation to Consumer Staples.

In terms of individual holdings, the top detractors from performance during the quarter were Astera Labs Inc., Deckers Outdoor Corp. and Evercore Inc., while the top contributors to performance were Sprouts Farmers Market Inc., TechnipFMC Plc and Doximity Inc.

Outlook

Despite recent challenges, including the sell-off in U.S. election beneficiaries, the Strategy manager remains optimistic about the long-term outlook. The manager believes the Strategy is well-positioned to capitalize on future opportunities, while staying mindful of potential near-term volatility driven by tariff concerns and upcoming earnings results.

The manager expects Q2 2025 to bring greater clarity to U.S. policies, potentially sparking a global market rally as historically, certainty has tended to drive positive momentum. Despite concerns over tariffs, the U.S. economy is expected to continue expanding, supported by consumer resilience, strong corporate cash flow, and well-capitalized balance sheets. While tariffs may impact goods and manufacturing, we believe the services-driven economy should help mitigate some negative effects. We expect small cap stocks may be more susceptible than large cap stocks to the relatively higher interest rates, currently in U.S. equity markets.

A reset in U.S. earnings expectations is anticipated in Q2, which could set the stage for broader global economic growth. We continue to focus on identifying emerging market leaders and capturing volatility-driven opportunities in sectors poised for growth. The Strategy remains agile, responding to market pullbacks and using them to capture leadership positions in future growth trends.

AGF U.S. Small-Mid Cap Growth Equity Strategy Annualized Returns – Period Ending March 31, 2025

	3 Months	YTD	1 Year	3 Year	5 Year	7 Year	10 Year
AGF U.S. Small-Mid Cap Growth Equity Composite (Gross)	-15.3%	-15.3%	-3.6%	-0.3%	11.3%	8.6%	9.5%
AGF U.S. Small-Mid Cap Growth Equity Composite (Net)	-15.4%	-15.4%	-4.4%	-1.2%	10.4%	7.7%	8.6%
S&P MidCap 400 Index	-6.1%	-6.1%	-2.7%	4.4%	16.9%	8.2%	8.4%
Gross Excess Return	-9.2%	-9.2%	-0.9%	-4.8%	-5.6%	0.4%	1.1%
Net Excess Return	-9.3%	-9.3%	-1.7%	-5.6%	-6.5%	-0.5%	0.1%

Source: AGF Investments as of March 31, 2025. Past performance is not indicative of future results. Performance is based on AGF U.S. Small-Mid Cap Growth Equity Composite, the GIPS-compliant presentation found at the end of the document. Performance is in U.S. dollars (US) and displays gross returns and net-of-fee returns. Net-of-fee returns are calculated by deducting the maximum institutional fee charged from the gross-of-fee return. One cannot invest directly in an index.

Strategy performance is based on the GIPS U.S. Small-Mid Cap Growth Equity Composite. The performance presented is gross and net of fees; rates of return for greater than one year have been annualized. AGF Investments uses Canadian dollar gross of fees returns and converts them on a monthly basis using spot rates sourced from Bloomberg. Net-of-fees returns are calculated by deducting the maximum institutional fee charged from the gross-of-fee return. Actual fees may vary depending upon the fee schedule and size.

Past performance is not indicative of future performance. The value of investments and the income from them can fall as well as rise. Investments denominated in foreign currencies are subject to fluctuations in exchange rates, which may have an adverse effect on the value of the investments, sale proceeds, and on dividend or interest income. Investors may not necessarily recoup the full value of their original investment. Investors should be aware that forward looking statements and forecasts may not be realized.

The information contained herein was provided by AGF Investments America Inc. and intends to provide you with information related to the AGF U.S. Small-Mid Cap Growth Equity Composite Strategy at a point in time. It is not intended to be investment advice applicable to any specific circumstance and should not be construed as investment advice. Market conditions may change impacting the composition of a portfolio. AGF Investments America Inc. assumes no responsibility for any investment decisions made based on the information provided herein.

References to specific securities are presented to illustrate the application of our investment philosophy only and are not to be considered recommendations by AGF Investments America Inc. The specific securities identified and described herein do not represent all of the securities purchased, sold or recommended for the portfolio, and it should not be assumed that investments in the securities identified were or will be profitable.

The commentaries contained herein are provided as a general source of information based on information available as of March 31 2025, and are not intended to be comprehensive investment advice applicable to the circumstances of the investor. Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy in these commentaries at the time of publication, however, accuracy cannot be guaranteed. Market conditions may change and AGF Investments America Inc. accepts no responsibility for individual investment decisions arising from the use or reliance on the information contained here.

This document may contain forward-looking information that reflects our current expectations or forecasts of future events. Forward-looking information is inherently subject to, among other things, risks, uncertainties and assumptions that could cause actual results to differ materially from those expressed herein.

An Investment in the AGF U.S. Small-Mid Cap Growth Equity Strategy is subject to risks including but not limited to: **Market Risk:** The value of small and mid-cap growth stocks can fluctuate significantly due to market conditions, economic events, and changes in interest rates, potentially leading to substantial losses and greater volatility. **Volatility Risk:** Small and mid-cap stocks tend to be more volatile than large-cap stocks. This means they can experience larger price swings, which can be both an opportunity and a risk. **Liquidity Risk:** Small and mid-cap stocks may have lower liquidity compared to large-cap stocks. This can make it more difficult to buy or sell these stocks at desired prices, especially during market downturns. **Concentration Risk:** The strategy may focus on a smaller number of stocks, which can increase volatility and risk if the selected stocks underperform. **Sector Risk:** Small and mid-cap growth strategies may have significant exposure to specific sectors. If these sectors experience downturns, it can negatively impact the performance of the strategy. **Economic and Political Risk:** Changes in economic policies, political events, or international developments can impact small and mid-cap growth stocks and may create greater volatility.

It should not be assumed that an investment in the strategy will be profitable or that the strategy will be able to meet its investment objective.

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Publication date: May 1, 2025

AGF U.S. Small-Mid Cap Growth Equity Composite January 1, 2014 – December 31, 2023

Year	Gross of Fee Composite Return (%)	Net of Fee Composite Return (%)	Benchmark Return (%)	Number of Portfolios	Internal Dispersion (%)	Composite 3-Yr St Dev (%)	Benchmark 3-Yr St Dev (%)	Composite AUM (USD\$ mil)	Firm AUM (USD\$ mil)
2014	-10.19	-11.03	9.77	1	N/A	13.79	11.86	150.31	24,571
2015	10.96	9.95	-2.18	1	N/A	14.47	11.81	145.66	18,957
2016	2.31	1.37	20.74	1	N/A	16.01	12.23	128.44	20,143
2017	35.16	33.95	16.24	1	N/A	13.86	10.91	151.72	23,063
2018	-0.94	-1.85	-11.08	1	N/A	16.11	13.31	143.38	20,178
2019	33.02	31.83	26.22	1	N/A	16.73	14.46	182.37	23,185
2020	44.79	43.60	13.66	1	N/A	23.54	23.31	293.98	24,066
2021	7.53	6.62	24.76	1	N/A	21.46	21.83	425.69	26,706
2022	-21.99	-22.67	-13.06	1	N/A	25.24	24.51	328.15	23,091
2023	3.23	2.36	16.44	1	N/A	21.54	19.74	331.47	24,659

Compliance Statement

AGF Investments claims compliance with the Global Investment Performance Standards (GIPS®) and has prepared and presented this report in compliance with the GIPS standards. AGF Investments has been independently verified for the periods January 1, 2006 - December 31, 2023.

A firm that claims compliance with the GIPS standards must establish policies and procedures for complying with all the applicable requirements of the GIPS standards. Verification provides assurance on whether the firm's policies and procedures related to composite and pooled fund maintenance, as well as the calculation, presentation, and distribution of performance, have been designed in compliance with the GIPS standards and have been implemented on a firm-wide basis. The AGF U.S. Small-Mid Cap Growth Equity Composite has had a performance examination for the periods January 1, 2006 to December 31, 2023. The verification and performance examination reports are available upon request.

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Firm Definition

Founded in 1957, AGF Management Limited (AGF) is an independent and globally diverse asset management firm. Our companies deliver excellence in investing in the public and private markets through three business lines: AGF Investments, AGF Capital Partners and AGF Private Wealth.

AGF brings a disciplined approach, focused on incorporating sound, responsible and sustainable corporate practices. The firm's collective investment expertise, driven by its fundamental, quantitative and private investing capabilities, extends globally to a wide range of clients, from financial advisors and their clients to high-net worth and institutional investors including pension plans, corporate plans, sovereign wealth funds, endowments and foundations.

Headquartered in Toronto, Canada, AGF has investment operations and client servicing teams on the ground in North America and Europe. AGF serves more than 800,000 investors. AGF trades on the Toronto Stock Exchange under the symbol AGF.B.

*AGF Investments represents AGF's group of companies who manage and advise on a variety of investment solutions managed by its fundamental and quantitative investing teams. AGF Investments Inc. is a wholly-owned subsidiary of AGF Management Limited and conducts the management and advisory of mutual funds in Canada.

Composite Description

The U.S. Small-Mid Cap High Growth Equity Composite includes all portfolios invested primarily in shares of small and medium companies with superior growth potential in the United States.

Composite Creation Date

The composite was created in January 2011. The composite's inception was in December 2005.

Benchmark Description

The benchmark is the S&P 400 MidCap Index. The S&P 400 MidCap Index measures the performance of mid-sized companies in the U.S. equities market with a market cap range between US\$ 1.4 billion - US\$ 5.9 billion at the time of addition to the index, it is part of a series of S&P U.S. indices that can be used as building blocks for portfolio construction. Prior to December 1, 2013 the benchmark was the Russell 2500 Growth Index.

Currency

Valuations and returns are computed and stated in U.S. Dollars.

Minimum Portfolio Size

There is no minimum portfolio size required for inclusion into the composite.

Calculation Methodology

Results reflect the reinvestment of dividends, income and other earnings.

Gross-of-fees returns are presented before management expenses and custodial fees, but after all trading expenses and withholding taxes.

Net of fees returns are calculated by deducting the maximum institutional fee charged from the gross of fee return.

Composite returns are calculated using asset-weighted returns by weighing the individual account returns using beginning-of-period values.

Internal Dispersion Measure

Internal dispersion is calculated using the asset-weighted standard deviation of all accounts included in the composite for the entire year; it is not presented for periods less than one year or when there were five or fewer portfolios in the composite for the entire year as this is not considered meaningful.

Three-year Annualized Ex-post Standard Deviation

The three-year annualized standard deviation measures the variability of the composite and the benchmark returns over the preceding 36-month period. The standard deviation is presented once the composite has three full calendar years of performance. Gross returns are used to calculate risk measures.

Fee Schedule

The maximum management fee for the Strategy is 0.85% per annum.

Additional Information

The portfolios in this composite are valued at systematic adjusted fair value.

Policies for fair value and systematic adjusted fair value portfolios, calculating performance, preparing compliant presentations, and a complete list and description of firm composites are available upon request at GIPS@AGF.com.

Past performance does not guarantee future results.