

Money markets: 3 things to watch in 2019

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- **The Federal Reserve** The Fed acted correctly at its December meeting when it raised rates 25 basis points to a target range of 2.25%-2.50% and pulled back its 2019 projections to two hikes from three. These moves fit with how the economy is performing now and how it might moderate in the near future. Further, the unanimous statement and Chair Powell's no-nonsense press conference suggest policymakers want to simplify their message. Look for them to constantly reiterate that their decisions are based on keeping inflation stable and maintaining strong employment—their mandate. They also likely will remind us that their policy tool is the federal funds rate, not the runoff of the balance sheet, and that they disregard market volatility and politics. Keep in mind that every meeting will have a press conference and the potential for policy action.
- **Fruits of volatility** Inflows to liquidity products likely will continue, spurred by equity market volatility. The question is that, when the markets eventually settle down, how much of the influx will remain due to the high level of return cash is now offering compared to the recent past and the expectation that the return will grow if rates continue to rise. Indeed, we expect a rate hike to come in the first half of this year with one more arriving in the second half before a potential pause, with the \$50 billion-a-month flood of securities from quantitative tapering putting additional upward pressure on rates.
- **“Steady”** We think this will be the watchword for government, prime and municipal money markets in 2019: steady corporate-earnings, economic performance and Fed communication. A recession may be coming, but has not yet appeared above the horizon. The Fed likely will be more watchful and data dependent about policy. This bodes well for liquidity products. Rare are cash managers and investors who don't like to earn a return above inflation in less-risky products. We think that in 2019, cash will be key, if not king.



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