IMS GROUP INSIGHTS · DIGITAL ASSETS

What the Family-Office Data Says

Separating interest from allocation, and sizing the trend in ranges.

Institutional crypto adoption read through the single-family-office lens: the distance between stated interest and committed capital, and the generational divide that is shifting the question from whether to how much.

Demand, not price

The public read on institutional crypto adoption is that it is surging. For an allocator, "surging" is not a number.

The more useful question is how much capital has actually moved, and on what evidence. IMS Group, a private markets investment group and partnership of family offices, reads that adoption the way a family office would: by separating interest from allocation, and sizing the trend in ranges rather than headlines.

Most coverage of this term speaks to "institutions" in the aggregate — pensions, endowments, sovereign funds, asset managers. It rarely looks at the data through the single family office, which is the allocator IMS Group is built around.

What the family-office data says

From that vantage point, two things matter more than the surge narrative: the distance between stated interest and committed capital, and a generational split in conviction the wider commentary leaves out.

The posture that holds up is demand, not price. Survey enthusiasm has run high, yet reported portfolio weights remain modest and uneven. A family office exploring custody is not the same as one that has funded a position. Trackers record genuine but measured allocation among those who hold, concentrated in a small set of assets (Preqin, 2024). Direction is clear; magnitude is contested, and a credible read says so.

72%

of investors aged 21–43 doubt stocks & bonds alone can deliver above-average returns (Bank of America, 2024)

28%

of investors aged 44+ say the same — the cohort gap the aggregate "institutions" framing buries

Demand vs allocation — the gap nobody sizes

The gap between interest and allocation tends to go unmeasured. Finding a statistic that a large share of family offices are "exploring" digital assets is easy. The harder questions are: what proportion have actually allocated, at what weight, and has that weight held through a full cycle? For a private-capital allocator, only the second set informs a portfolio decision. Treating a survey of curiosity as committed capital is exactly the error the surge framing invites.

The next-generation allocator

Beneath the aggregate sits a generational divide. The 72%-versus-28% split is a sentiment split by age, not a demographic headcount, and it points directly at digital-asset appetite: the same younger cohort reports materially higher interest in alternatives, private markets and digital assets. As that cohort steps into family-office decision-making, the mandate question stops being whether digital assets belong and becomes how they should be sized.

How allocators gain exposure

Allocators reach digital assets through a small number of routes, and the choice is a governance decision as much as an investment one: regulated funds and ETPs, direct holdings under qualified custody, tokenised exposure, and externally managed mandates. Each carries a different operational and control profile, which is why family offices weigh custody and governance before they weigh price.

Regulated fund wrappers are the clearest evidence the access infrastructure has matured. US spot bitcoin ETFs gave allocators a familiar, custodied, reportable wrapper, with IBIT cited as bringing institutional-grade plumbing to the asset (BlackRock, 2024). On the tokenisation side, BlackRock's BUIDL tokenised money-market fund is early evidence that regulated, yield-bearing instruments can settle on-chain (BlackRock / Securitize, 2024).

For allocators who hold directly, the custody layer is where the decision concentrates. A recognisable set of qualified custodians — Fidelity Digital Assets, Anchorage Digital, BitGo and Coinbase Prime — now serves institutional clients. The right choice is specific to a family office's governance, jurisdiction and risk posture.

What still holds allocators back

If adoption were frictionless, the gap between interest and allocation would already have closed. It has not, and the reasons are practical rather than ideological. Regulatory treatment still varies by jurisdiction, which makes some allocators reasonably wait for clarity. Custody, while much improved, remains a deliberate decision: selecting a custodian, defining controls and assigning operational responsibility are governance tasks, not box-ticking ones.

For a family office, two constraints dominate. Governance: a new asset class has to fit an existing investment policy, approval process and reporting standard before it can be funded, and that takes time by design. And position-sizing discipline: an allocator that has separated interest from allocation sizes a position to conviction and risk budget, not to the prevailing mood — which is why measured weights, rather than reluctance, are often what the data is showing.

From whether to how much

For the family-office allocator, the centre of the question has shifted. The debate is no longer whether digital assets belong; it is how much weight they warrant and through which structure. The honest answer is a range, not a single figure. Adoption is broadening and the infrastructure is maturing, but committed allocation remains modest and unevenly distributed.

> Interest is not allocation — and only allocation informs a portfolio decision.

What gives the trend durability is the generational handover underneath it. As a larger, younger cohort of principals takes control of family-office capital, a private-markets-first disposition and a higher tolerance for digital assets move with them. Where the trend is heading is not in doubt; how quickly and how far it runs remain open questions, read as a range to be underwritten across cycles rather than a headline to be chased.

Frequently asked questions

What does institutional adoption mean in crypto?

Professional allocators — banks, asset managers, custodians and family offices — treating digital assets as an investable category governed by formal mandate, qualified custody, risk policy and reporting, rather than speculative retail participation. The marker is whether the asset has been brought inside the allocation process under proper governance.

Which crypto are institutions buying?

Bitcoin dominates institutional exposure, accessed largely through regulated vehicles such as spot bitcoin ETFs and qualified custody, with ether a secondary holding. Dollar stablecoins are used increasingly as an institutional settlement rail rather than a directional position.

What is the best institutional custody for crypto?

There is no single "best"; custody is a governance decision each allocator makes on its own diligence. The field includes Fidelity Digital Assets, Anchorage, BitGo and Coinbase Prime, all providing qualified custody, segregation and institutional controls.

Sources & important information

1. Bank of America Private Bank (2024). Study of Wealthy Americans — 72% of investors aged 21–43 vs 28% aged 44+ doubt stocks and bonds alone can deliver above-average returns.

2. Preqin (2024). Investor allocation trends in alternatives and digital assets.

3. BlackRock (2024). iShares Bitcoin Trust (IBIT) — US spot bitcoin ETF as institutional access infrastructure. Point-in-time.

4. BlackRock / Securitize (2024). BUIDL — tokenised money-market fund as adoption-infrastructure evidence. Point-in-time.

Point-in-time figures are volatile and should be re-verified on the date of publication.

Important information

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Reading adoption honestly — interest is not allocation, and only allocation informs a decision.

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