



A GUIDE TO PUTTING YOUR AFFAIRS IN ORDER

HOW TO ORGANIZE YOUR PAPERS AND PREPARE INSTRUCTIONS FOR YOUR LOVED ONES

If you are making an estate plan or have just put one in place, now is an excellent time to take the extra steps to “put your affairs in order.” You needn’t wait until you are seriously ill or elderly. It’s never too soon to put your affairs in order, but it’s easy to put the chore off until it’s too late.

Getting your affairs in order is a two step process that requires you to:

- Gather your important papers and put them in a secure location.
- Prepare instructions for the person or persons who will manage your affairs if you are incapacitated or wrap them up when you pass on.

Getting your affairs in order may seem like a depressing task. But many people find it brings them great peace of mind to know they have done everything possible to reduce the burden on their loved ones.

GATHERING AND SECURING IMPORTANT PAPERS

CHECKLIST OF IMPORTANT PAPERS

Here is a checklist of “important papers” that your loved ones may need to manage or wrap up your affairs. Depending on your family circumstances, you may decide to include others.

Estate planning documents:

- Will
- Living trust
- Other trusts of which you are the settler, trustee, or beneficiary
- Health care directives
- Durable power of attorney for finances.
- Prepaid funeral contract
- Burial plot deed

Personal legal papers:

- Birth certificate
- Social security card
- Marriage certificate
- Prenuptial agreement
- Divorce settlement agreement and divorce judgment
- Adoption papers
- Military discharge
- Passport

Real estate:

- Deeds
- Mortgage documents
- Leases
- Recent appraisals

Business interests:

- Partnership agreements

- LLC operating agreements

Valuable personal property:

- Certificates of authenticity
- Appraisals

Insurance:

- Policies
- Copies of beneficiary designations

Stocks and bonds:

- Certificates

Vehicles:

- Titles
- Loan documents

Promissory notes:

- That you owe to others
- That others owe to you

Taxes:

- Personal income tax returns for last three years
- Gift tax returns

WHERE TO PUT THEM

Home safe. Once you have gathered your important documents, you want to put them in a safe place. A waterproof, fireproof safe is an excellent choice for all documents, particularly for those that could be needed immediately on your incapacity or death. These include your will, living trust, durable power of attorney for finances, and health care directives. You can then provide another trusted individual (e.g., an adult child or your agent or executor) with access to the safe.

Safe deposit box. A safe deposit box can be used to store important documents. However, often the box is not immediately accessible after your death or incapacity. Thus, it's not the best place to store anything that might be needed immediately including estate planning documents and instructions for the disposition of your body.

Cloud storage. Cloud storage is also an option for saving important documents. Documents stored online are protected from natural disasters and can be accessed from anywhere at any time. However, you will have to scan the

documents before they can be uploaded. For some purposes, originals may be required. Thus, cloud storage may be more of a backup than your primary storage method.

PREPARING YOUR INSTRUCTION MANUAL

DIGITAL OR PAPER?

You can create a hard copy of your manual that you place in a binder, folder, or envelop; or a digital version that you save on a flash drive or in online storage. In deciding which, bear in mind that you want the manual to be 1) easy for you to prepare and revise; 2) stored in a secure place because it will contain personal and confidential information; and 3) easily accessible to the trusted person or persons you have chosen to manage your affairs and administer your estate.

Whether you choose to create a hard copy or a digital version on a flash drive, a good solution is to store your manual in your home safe along with your other estate planning documents.

WHAT TO COVER

Here is a suggested outline for your manual organized by topic.

PART I. PERSONAL AND FAMILY HISTORY

This information will be useful for obtaining a death certificate, preparing your obituary, identifying your heirs, and preparing your tax returns. Include:

- Your name, address, phone number, drivers' license number, and social security number.
- Date and location of birth.
- Education history.
- Military service history.
- Work/career history.
- Marriages (dates and spouses' names).
- Divorces (dates and spouses' names).
- Children (names, birthdates, addresses).
- Grandchildren (names, birthdates, addresses).
- Parents and siblings (names, birthdates, addresses).

PART II. ESTATE PLANNING DOCUMENTS

This information will help your loved ones quickly locate your estate planning documents and notify your chosen agents and representatives of your death or incapacity.

List the estate planning documents you have executed (e.g., will, living trust, durable power of attorney for finances, health care directives) and indicate the location of the originals and copies.

Provide contact information for the executor of your will, successor trustee of your living trust, agent under your durable power of attorney, and health care agent, along with alternates if you have named any.

If you are incapacitated, your durable power of attorney for finances remains in effect and your health care directives go into effect. If you have died, both documents are cancelled, except that your health care directives may indicate your desires for the disposition of your body.

PART III. DISPOSITION OF YOUR BODY AND FUNERAL SERVICES

A. Organ, Tissue, or Body Donation

Let your loved ones know if you want to donate your organs or tissues or body. If you want to be an organ donor, it's also a good idea to carry a card in your wallet, put a sticker on your driver's license, or indicate your choice in your health care directives. If you want to donate your body to a medical school or other research facility, it's best if you make advance arrangements to ensure that your gift will be accepted. Then provide the contact information for the institution you have chosen.

B. Burial/Cremation

Indicate your wishes and any arrangements you have made for the final disposition of your body. These would include:

- Whether you want to be buried or cremated.
- If buried, whether you want your body embalmed; where you would like to be buried; and whether you own a cemetery plot and the location of the deed.
- If cremated, what you would like done with your cremains.
- The funeral home or cremation provider you would like to use.

C. Services

Let your loved ones know whether you want a wake, funeral, or memorial service. If you want a service, you can describe your preferences for the type of service including location, music, readings, flowers, speakers, whether you want your casket present, and whether it should be opened or closed.

If you have a prepaid funeral contract, indicate whom it is with and where the contract is stored.

PART IV. ARRANGEMENTS FOR THOSE WHO DEPEND ON YOU FOR CARE

A. Minor Children

List the name and contact information for the person you have named in your will to act as guardian of your minor children and the person you have named in your will, trust, or beneficiary designations to manage any property the children will inherit that is not left in a trust. If you die or become incapacitated, your designation of a guardian will be effective only if the children have no other parent or the parent is unable or unwilling to care for them.

You can provide instructions for immediate care of the children until the guardian is able to take over. Also provide names and contact information for other care providers, such as the children's health care professionals, daycare provider, and babysitters.

B. Adults

If you care for adults, such as an elderly relative or special needs adult child, describe the care you are providing and indicate any arrangements you have made or would like to have made for that person's care.

C. Pets

List your pets (name, species, chip numbers) and describe arrangements you have made for their disposition or set out your preferences for who should have them. You can also provide care instructions for each pet and contact information for your veterinarian.

PART V. INCOME

Here list the sources of regular income you receive. This information will enable your representative to provide them with notice of your death or incapacity and determine if you, your estate, or family members are entitled to additional payments or whether any overpayments need to be returned.

A. Employment

If you are employed, provide contact information for your employer.

B. Pensions

If you are receiving or are entitled to a pension, provide contact information for your pension plan administrator.

C. Government Benefits

List any government benefits you currently receive, and the program from which you receive them.

PART VI. PROPERTY

This information will enable your agent or representative to locate and protect the value of your assets.

A. Real Estate

List the address of any properties you own and the location of the deeds, mortgage documents, and leases, if any. If your property is mortgaged, provide the account number and contact information for the mortgage holder. If your property is leased, provide contact information for the lessees and amount of rent.

List the address of any properties you rent, contact information for the owner or manager, the amount of rent, the term of the lease, and where the lease is located.

B. Vehicles

For each vehicle you own, list: the type of vehicle; make, model, and year; VIN number; plate number; location; location of title and registration; name(s) on title; and, if the vehicle is financed, contact information for the creditor.

C. Bank and Brokerage Accounts

For each account provide: the type of account, the account number, contact information for the institution, type of assets held in the account, name(s) on the account, pay on death beneficiary if any, location of statements, and user name and password for online access to the account. If you have an ATM card, provide the card number and PIN.

D. Retirement Accounts

For each account, provide type of plan, account number, contact information for the plan administrator, identity of beneficiaries, location of statements, and user name and password for online access to the account.

It's a good idea to advise your beneficiaries in advance and suggest they get professional advice on their options for receiving plan distributions that will minimize taxes and maximize the value of the distribution.

E. Business Interests

Provide the name and address of the business, names of owners and their ownership percentages, principal assets and liabilities, key employees, and your succession plan. Also provide the location of business documents.

F. Other Property You Own

Describe any other significant assets you own such as cash, jewelry, art, antiques, collections etc. and where they are kept. Don't forget items in storage or on loan to others.

PART VII. INSURANCE

List your insurance policies. For each policy provide the type of insurance, policy number, and contact information for the insurer. Include:

- Life and accidental death and dismemberment insurance. For this type of insurance, also identify the beneficiaries.
- Long term care insurance.
- Medical and dental insurance.
- Homeowner's and other property insurance.
- Motor vehicle insurance.
- Other insurance, e.g., malpractice; errors and omissions; personal liability; and umbrella.

Your agent or representative will need this information to make claims, continue to pay premiums if necessary to keep the policy in force, and to cancel the policy when it is no longer needed.

PART VIII. DEBTS

Your agent or representative will need this information to pay your debts, which must be paid before your estate can be distributed, and to make sure all sums due to you or your estate are received.

A. That You Owe

List your debts, such as student loans, personal loans, and credit cards. Provide your account numbers, contact information for each creditor, and location of any other relevant paperwork.

B. That Are Owed to You

List the type of debt, contact information for the debtor, and location of the note or any other relevant paperwork, such as a payment schedule and payment history.

PART IX. LOCKED PLACES

Here you should provide access instructions for all your locked places, both digital and physical. They could include:

A. Locked Storage

Provide information about storage units and safe deposit boxes. Include name of institution or business, location, box or unit number, names of people with access, location of keys, and combinations.

B. Electronic Equipment and Digital Spaces

List user ids and passwords for accessing: computers; tablets; cell phones; apps; cloud storage, Wi-Fi, email, etc.

C. Physical Places

Provide the location for keys and access codes for: homes, vehicles, garages and storage sheds, home security system, safes, mailbox, file cabinets, locked drawers, security gates, etc.

X. SERVICE PROVIDERS

Provide contact information for your regular service providers, e.g., health care practitioners, lawyer, accountant/tax preparer, home maintenance providers, personal care providers, and vehicle maintenance providers. If you are incapacitated, your agent may want to continue many of these services for your benefit. After your death, some may need to be continued to preserve your property and ultimately your representative will need to cancel them.

XI. MEMBERSHIPS

List memberships in organizations that will need to be notified of your death. The list could include everything from professional and civic organizations, to volunteer groups, to your church, to retail buyers' clubs (e.g., Costco or Amazon Prime).

ADDITIONAL HELP

All this information may seem overwhelming to collect. You don't have to do it in one sitting. Set aside some time each week and begin with the topics you think will be easiest. Once you complete a topic or two, the task will seem more manageable. For more help, you may want to purchase one of the many books on the subject of organizing your affairs. Some provide fill-in-the-blank worksheets for creating your instruction manual. These will guide you to include all the information that your survivors will need and ensure that nothing slips through the cracks.