

ESTATE PLANNING CHECKLIST

20 Things You Can Do to Get Your Estate in Order

Here is a checklist to help you organize your estate and depending on your individual situation, you might discover other items to be addressed. It's a good idea to discuss your plans with the executor of your will. You'll also want to consult with your legal, financial and tax advisers.

ESTATE PLANNING

1. **Make or update your will.** A will allows you to determine what happens to your money and possessions when you die. Otherwise, state laws and courts make those decisions for you. The Archdiocese of Cincinnati asks archdiocesan priests to provide them with a copy so that it is easily available if needed.
2. **Consider charitable intent.** Charitably-minded people may want to include a gift to their favorite charities through their estate. It is a wonderful way to create a lasting legacy. It is helpful if you let the recipient know of your future gift, and how you would like the gift to be used.
3. **Make a Catholic healthcare advance directive.** This document can speak for you by outlining the medical procedures you want taken if you become too ill to state your wishes yourself. Make sure a HIPAA release is included so that those you designate can be given information.
4. **Create durable powers of attorney.** These documents allow you to appoint someone to make decisions on your behalf if you become incapacitated. There are two types: one to deal with your personal, legal and financial affairs, and another to deal with health-care decisions (health care proxy).
5. **Create a letter of instruction.** This document provides a list of instructions for your survivors to follow. For example, it can spell out your funeral mass wishes, people to contact, and where your will and other key papers can be found. It also can provide information about your financial accounts and activities.
6. **Calculate your net worth, including life insurance proceeds.** If you have substantial net worth, consider talking to a tax or financial adviser to determine steps necessary to minimize or eliminate the impact of federal and state estate taxes.
7. **Establish a trust if appropriate.** A trust is a legal entity that holds property designated by you for the benefit of you and your beneficiaries.

INSURANCE PLANNING

8. **Buy or update your life insurance.** Life insurance provides an immediate source of cash that can be exempt from federal and state income tax (but, in general, not estate taxes). It is important to review your ownership, beneficiary and coverage amount every two or three years to make sure your policies still reflect your needs and wishes.
9. **Consider buying health/medical insurance.** There are three major types of coverage that help protect and stretch your assets: Long-Term Care enables you to cover the cost of long-term health care in your home or at a long-term care facility, Major Medical protects you against the rising cost of medical care and Disability helps protect your income if you can no longer work.
10. **Review your IRA, 401(k) and other retirement plans** for beneficiary arrangements and benefits.

ORGANIZING FINANCIAL RECORDS

NOTE: If you store any of the following information on your computer, make a list of all passwords and where the information can be found.

11. **Create a list of financial accounts.** List account numbers and pertinent information about your investments, bank accounts, insurance policies (life, disability, homeowners, credit and life), credit card accounts and other financial holdings.
12. **List the location of valuable documents.** Your list should include tax records, deeds, car titles, military records, birth and marriage certificates, divorce decrees and estate planning documents.
13. **List your personal data.** This can include your Social Security number, driver's license number, VA claim number, your date of birth and the names and phone numbers of family members.
14. **Make arrangements for access to your safe-deposit box.** In many states, safe-deposit boxes are closed upon death and are not opened until probate. Make sure copies of your will and other important documents are available outside of your safe-deposit box.
15. **List loan payments.** This listing should include information about credit cards, mortgages, consumer loans, and auto and personal loans.
16. **List other income sources and government benefits.** This includes pensions, military benefits and Social Security.
17. **Verify account ownership and beneficiary designations.** Check financial accounts and insurance policies to make sure these conform to your estate planning arrangements.
18. **List all organizations in which you have membership.** They may provide special death benefits and should be noted for your survivors to contact if appropriate.

PERSONAL PLANNING

19. **Provide a trusted family member or friend** with the location of confidential or valuable items you may have put away for safekeeping. Provide them with the location of spare keys and security codes.
20. **Provide easy access to your will and your durable powers of attorney.** Keep signed, original copies in your attorney's office as well as a copy in a fireproof file at home. Also give a signed copy to your executor.