

Executor *checklist*

Managing the estate of a loved one can feel overwhelming as you try to figure out your duties and the steps to take. There are two distinct roles: an executor is responsible for administering the deceased's estate, while the trustee is responsible for running any trusts created in the will. Quite often in family situations, the executor and trustee are the same person. Whatever role you have, you will be accountable for keeping complete and accurate records regarding your handling of it.

The following checklist is designed to help you navigate the estate and trust administration process and understand what to do to settle your loved one's estate in the days, weeks, and months after their death. Please consult with an estate attorney to make sure you have a complete understanding of all tasks that need to be undertaken.

Immediate steps

Locate the will and review any instructions about the funeral, burial, cremation, etc.

Make funeral arrangements in accordance with the deceased's wishes. Request information on burial and mortuary benefits for veterans, if applicable.

Arrange for temporary care of dependents and pets.

Determine immediate family cash needs.

Secure valuable assets (e.g., home, personal valuables) and important documents.

Obtain multiple copies of the death certificate (provided by the funeral director), which you will need for various situations, including insurance claims, tax filings, and asset and property transfers.

Report the death to Social Security and apply for survivor's benefits, if applicable.

Report the death to any pension administrators.

Notify Medicare using the deceased's Social Security Number.

Determine with the deceased's estate attorney the level of probate (full administration or a more minor process) and file the will in probate court if necessary.

Notify beneficiaries.

Notify banks, financial professionals, accountants, insurers, and mortgage companies.

Cancel any credit and debit cards that are solely in the deceased's name and request transfers to the surviving accountholder for any cards held jointly.

Notify utility companies.

Arrange to pay recurring expenses and bills.

Contact the deceased's estate lawyer and financial professional(s).

Within weeks

Ensure all assets are properly identified, prepare an inventory, and document the value of all estate-owned assets.

Pay debts and notify creditors.

Collect any debts owed to the estate.

Cancel memberships and subscriptions.

Cancel passport, driver's license, and Social Security Number.

Close social media accounts as they can be susceptible to identity theft if left active.

Notify Veterans Affairs, if applicable.

Contact the deceased's past and recent employers and check eligibility for group life or accident insurance benefits, retiree life insurance, and company pension or savings plan payments to beneficiaries.

File life insurance claims and arrange for proceeds to be paid to beneficiaries or the estate as directed.

Transfer the title to the deceased's residence and other real estate or titled assets (e.g., vehicle, rental property) to the surviving spouse or named beneficiary.

Review the will with any beneficiaries.

Review the status of any legal actions in which the deceased was involved.

Within months

Sell assets as directed by the will or as otherwise required.

Distribute specific assets or gifts to beneficiaries as instructed under the will.

Maintain records of all actions taken on behalf of the estate.

Determine federal and state tax filing requirements.

Apply for executor compensation, if applicable.

Distribute residual estate assets.

Obtain releases from beneficiaries.

If you are a surviving spouse, meet with your estate attorney to review your will and estate plan to ensure it still aligns with your wishes.

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