

Estate Planning

Checklist

You know you should be doing some estate planning, but do you know where to start? Here is a checklist that you may use to begin establishing your own estate plan. Keep in mind that while this checklist is extensive, it is by no means exhaustive. As always, your financial advisor can help you pull together the professionals you need to review your situation and choose the right planning devices.

To ensure that your estate plan is comprehensive and effective, complete the following tasks.

- Hire an attorney who specializes in estate planning and any other needed advisors, such as an accountant, that can provide advice and draft estate planning documents.
- Gather information on your current financial condition and future financial needs.
- Make an inventory of all assets, property titling, liabilities, income and expenses.
- Determine your goals and objectives in estate planning, such as providing financial security for family, giving to charity, avoiding taxation, etc.
- Formulate a plan with your advisors that accomplishes your goals and minimizes tax depletion of your estate.
- Choose beneficiaries of your estate plans. If desired, designate what specific property or interests should be distributed to each beneficiary.
- Select guardians to be responsible for the care and management of any minor children that you may predecease.
- Prepare for incapacity by naming an individual(s) who will manage your property and make any needed health care decisions.
- If using a trust, decide which assets will be used to fund the trust. Name a trustee to manage the trust property and administer your trust.
- If using a will, nominate an executor to carry out the provisions in your will.
- Investigate how life insurance can be used in your estate plan to provide for surviving beneficiaries or to cover liquidity needs of the estate.
- Explore ways to include charity in your estate plans through outright gifts, charitable trusts or other techniques.
- If a business interest is a part of your estate, plan for successor ownership and the disposition of your interests.
- Consider making tax-free gifts of up to \$13,000 for single taxpayers or \$26,000 for married couples (as indexed for 2009) during life by using the annual exclusion. Making lifetime gifts will reduce the size of your taxable estate at death.
- Select a safe and accessible place to keep all estate planning documents, such as a lock box or fireproof safe. Notify attorneys and any other interested persons (e.g. executor) of the location of those documents.