

Estate Trustee Checklist

Being an Estate Trustee can be an overwhelming experience. Here's a quick guide about what to expect and how to prepare for the process ahead.

The estate settlement process

Make immediate arrangements

Make funeral arrangements, get multiple copies of the Proof of Death certificate and locate the will.

Tell the financial institution

Notify the right people and financial institutions. This could include multiple banks or credit unions, an accountant, a lawyer, a realtor, and the Canadian Revenue Agency to cancel scheduled pension payments. Most institutions will require an original Proof Of Death certificate.

Consider probate

Probate is a process to validate the will. The role of an Estate Trustee is to protect the Estate's assets, settle debts and carryout the deceased's intention in accordance with their will.

Settle the estate

Once all the debts are paid and a final tax return is completed, the remaining assets can be distributed to the Estate beneficiaries.

First Steps

- ✓ Locate the original Will
 - It may be in a safety deposit box or with a lawyer
 - Confirm the Estate Trustee(s)
 - Determine if there are special instructions concerning funeral arrangements
- ✓ Assist with making funeral arrangements
- ✓ Communicate with family and beneficiaries
 - Provide a copy of the Will as applicable
 - Determine immediate financial needs and ensure they are met
- ✓ Obtain several copies of the Death Certificate or Funeral Director's Statement of Death
- ✓ Arrange for Canada Post to redirect mail

Protect the Estate

- ✓ Secure residence and other assets (car, property)
 - Ensure property is maintained (snow removal, etc.) and bills are paid
- ✓ Review and verify that adequate insurance coverage is in place
- ✓ Notify financial institutions, insurance companies, brokers and employers
 - If applicable, confirm outstanding balances and cancel credit cards and prepare a listing of safe deposit box contents
- ✓ Arrange for safekeeping of valuables

Inventory of Assets and Liabilities

- ✓ Begin claims on life insurance policies
- ✓ Investigate any jointly held accounts and identify if it makes up part of the estate
- ✓ Locate and obtain title documents for real estate property, mortgages, and any other physical or investment asset
- ✓ Arrange valuation of real estate, personal property and vehicles
- ✓ Contact a Wealth Advisor
 - Coordinate a review and valuation of the investment portfolio
 - Prepare a complete summary of assets and liabilities
- ✓ Determine entitlement and apply for Canada Pension Plan Death Benefits, Survivor's Benefits and Child(ren)'s Benefits
- ✓ Contact the Deceased's employer to verify any income owing and to determine benefits to which the spouse/family may be entitled

Probate

- ✓ Arrange with a lawyer for probate of the Will
 - A probated Will is acknowledged by the courts to be the deceased's Last Will and Testament. It confirms the Estate Trustee and acknowledges his or her authority to carry out the terms of the Will. Most financial institutions require probate before they will release a deceased person's assets because it assures the institution is transferring the assets to the person lawfully entitled to receive them.
- ✓ Once Probate obtained, open an Estate Account to deposit income, pay expenses and consolidate account balances held in the Deceased's name
- ✓ Bring the following to your Estate Account appointment:
 - Original or notarized copy of the Proof of Death Certificate (usually provided by the funeral home or hospital in which the deceased had passed)
 - Original or notarized copy of the last will
 - Invoices related to funeral expenses
 - Utility bills related to estate property (gas, water, etc.)
 - Account information or recent account statements if available
 - Valid identification (Driver's License, Passport, etc.)
- ✓ Prepare and file an Estate Information Return (required in Ontario) with the Ministry of Finance within 180 days of probate

Administration

- ✓ Cancel passport, driver's license, any utilities, social media accounts, loyalty/points cards, subscriptions, such as magazines, and request refunds.
- ✓ If applicable:
 - Contact Canada Pension Plan to cancel pension benefits
 - Contact Service Canada to cancel Old Age Security Pension benefits/ Guaranteed Income Supplement
 - Contact Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to cancel GST/HST
 - Contact CRA regarding Child Allowance and Child Tax benefits received by the Deceased
 - Identify any foreign assets and determine whether a foreign Will exists to administer them
 - Cancel foreign pension
 - Cancel the Deceased's lease or arrange a sublet for the premises
 - Arrange for care or adoption of pets

Taxes

- ✓ Obtain a copy of previous years' tax return
 - File any outstanding returns from previous years if not yet filed
- ✓ Prepare and file final tax return(s) and if applicable returns for international jurisdictions
- ✓ Pay all income tax owing
- ✓ Apply for Final Clearance Certificate from CRA once notice of assessment is received, confirm any tax liabilities have been settled

Disbursements

- ✓ Settle legitimate claims prior to final distribution of assets, obtaining receipts for any payments made
- ✓ Distribute remaining assets to beneficiaries in accordance with the Will and obtain receipts from beneficiaries
 - Sign Letters of Direction as required by the FI
 - Ensure sufficient funds are retained to pay outstanding taxes, if applicable
- ✓ Assist in establishing any trusts stipulated by the Will
- ✓ Prepare final report/account of all estate transactions for the beneficiaries, including Estate Trustee compensation
 - As Estate Trustee, you are entitled to receive financial compensation. The fee may be stipulated in the Will or agreed upon by the beneficiaries or approved by the court. At a minimum, you are entitled to reimbursement of any expenses incurred while carrying out your duties
- ✓ Arrange for closing the estate bank account after confirming all payments and cheques have cleared

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The information contained in the above checklist is not intended to be legal advice for any specific situation, but only as general information to assist you in better understanding what may need to be considered when administering an estate of ordinary complexity. In any event, we strongly recommend that you seek professional income tax, investment and legal advice to determine what you should be doing in the particular circumstances you face as an estate trustee. If you have any additional questions about settling an estate, or any other aspect of estate planning, please speak with a Meridian Advisor or call our Contact Centre at 1-866-592-2226.