

More Than Numbers

Everything in One Place: Leaving an Information Legacy

Too often, individuals or couples consider estate planning to be only the preparation of wills and trusts. They don't take the next critical step of gathering all of the information their heirs or executors will need to swiftly and smoothly complete their wishes. This lack of organized information leads to unnecessary stress on surviving family members and can lead to a significant increase in professional fees.

Personal Experience

My interest in this topic grew from my own experience of trying to assist my father in organizing his financial information. After he had a stroke, my mother called me to express concern that she would not be able to find all of the financial and personal information she would need, as my father had handled all the finances. It took some perseverance on my part, but I finally convinced him to sit down with me to create a binder for my mother.

The binder included information related to assets, insurance, pensions, important contacts and the location of important estate planning documents. Seven years went by and, in April 2012, I sat down again with my father to update the binder. He passed away only four months later. As co-trustee of his trust I was thankful that I had this binder as a guide to implementing my father's estate plan.

Obstacles to Organizing

In my case, it took months to get my father to tackle the task. Many individuals delay organizing this information because they think they have plenty of time to live—or do not want to consider their mortality. The problem is that this vital information might also be needed in the case of incapacity. The lack of records could cause all of the same administrative issues one faces after a death. The distraught or grieving spouse, the children or the trustee have to then scramble to discover financial assets and obligations.

Another obstacle to organizing is a tendency to keep our financial life private.



Too often, individuals or couples consider estate planning to be only the preparation of wills and trusts.

A parent may not want a child who will administer a trust or an estate to know the extent of the assets they might inherit. The downside to this, however, is that some assets may go undiscovered.

Declining mental or physical health can also impede the organizing of important financial information. For example, in the case of an individual with declining mental capabilities, they may not remember assets such as life insurance policies purchased long ago. They may also forget where their important estate planning documents are or where the safe deposit box key is. In the case

of physical decline, they may no longer be able to read or comprehend documents, preventing them from taking steps to gather important information.

What Happens When No Information Is Provided?

Individuals who neglect to organize their financial information leave behind hurdles that family members, loved ones and trustees must clear.

According to Cameron Miller, attorney-at-law with Jackson and Miller, “there is a very good chance assets will be overlooked or not discovered for years. Unclaimed assets could be transferred to the state of California, where it is very difficult to recover them. There may be private investments, which would not generate any clues, such as real estate. Investments in non-public partnerships could go undetected for up to a year or more until a K-1 form might arrive in the mail. If the mail is forwarded to a family member or trustee, and the forwarding period runs out, important notifications will be lost.”

How Do You Start Looking for Assets?

The trustee could request a transcript of the most recent individual tax return, which might identify income-generating assets. However, with such low interest rates, there could be substantial cash deposits in non-interest bearing accounts. Other clues could be gleaned from bills and statements.

“However, it's very difficult to detect life insurance policies unless the policy has periodic premiums due,” says Miller. “A policy may have cash value which would be covering premiums, and therefore no correspondence would be received on a regular basis.”

Missing Significant Financial Assets

During the organizing project with my father, he told me that he received deferred compensation for 10 years following his retirement. As part of that compensation, he had elected a lesser current payout so my

More Than Numbers

mother would receive a survivor’s benefit. My mother would be entitled to an annual benefit for 10 years, beginning in the year my father died.

In reviewing the voluminous files and records of my father after he passed away, there was no record of this arrangement—only what my father had told me. Because of the information in the binder we prepared, though, I was able to follow up with his former employer to claim this benefit for my mother.

Specific Steps

So where does one start the process of organizing their financial and personal information? The first information that should be listed is the contact information for the attorney, accountant and trustee or executor. Along with that should be the location of all estate planning documents. Next, list in detail all assets, including bank accounts, brokerage accounts, stocks held outright, real estate, retirement accounts, life insurance policies and other death benefits.

Information about other assets, such as partnership or business interests, should be included, too. In the case of life insurance policies, a copy of the declarations page should be included. This will be critical to

filing a claim and requesting Form 712 from the insurance carrier for the preparation of an estate tax return should one need to be filed.

There is a new area of estate planning, too, that focuses on digital assets. This includes your physical presence on the Internet, such as email accounts and social media accounts, as well as digital assets, such as manuscripts or art that are password protected. While one might want to write down usernames and passwords for one’s heirs, it’s a felony to use another person’s username and password. It’s important to read the user agreement for any Internet service provider to determine its policy with respect to access by individuals other than the subscriber.

Short of setting up a digital asset trust, one should consider backing up all digital records onto an external format and storing the external drives as you would any other important documents.


Also on the financial information list should be the location of all-important documents, including trusts, wills, deeds, contracts, pink slips, homeowners policies, medical insurance policies, life insurance policies and long-term care policies. Miller recommends “either a fire-safe file box for the home or a safe deposit

box. In the case of a safe deposit box, make sure your heirs or your trustee know where the key and the box number are. Better yet, add an adult child or trustee as an owner of the box so they are entitled to immediate access.”

Keeping Current

Whether one keeps the newly gathered information in a binder or in another format, it should be periodically reviewed and updated. Assets, liabilities, policies and estate documents change over time, and the goal is to maintain as complete a record as possible.

Be sure to tell those individuals who will need this information that it has been accumulated and where it can be found. You can download an organizer to assist in the collection of important personal and financial information at ~~<http://bit.ly/fixePP4>~~ <https://db.tt/W6tj0WQB>

Organizing financial and personal information for heirs spares them the task of digging through records and reconstructing information. The sooner the administration of the estate can be completed, the sooner the family can heal from their loss. 

Jeanne L. Wiener, CPA/PFS is tax manager at Young, Craig & Co, LLP. You can reach her at jeanne@yccllp.com.

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Guide to Important Personal and Financial Information

Prepared by Jeanne L. Wiener, CPA/PFS

Guide to Important Personal and Financial Information

Part 1: Medical and Emergency Information

Emergency Contact Information

Name:
Relationship:
Phone:

Primary Health Insurance Provider

Company:
Address:
Phone:
Subscriber ID#:

Secondary Health Insurance Provider

Company:
Address:
Phone:
Subscriber ID#

Pharmacy Information

Company:
Location:
Phone:

Current Medications (attach additional sheets as needed)

Name of medication:
Dosage:
Prescribing doctor:
Reason for prescription:

Name of Medication:
Dosage:
Prescribing doctor:
Reason for prescription:

Physician information

Name of doctor:
Address:
Phone:
Email:

Guide to Important Personal and Financial Information

Part 1: Medical and Emergency Information (cont.)

Current Health Issues:

Part 2: Home Safety

Utility shutoffs

Location of water shutoff:

Location of gas shutoff:

Location of circuit breaker panel:

Home maintenance providers

Plumber

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Electrician

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Other

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Guide to Important Personal and Financial Information

Part 3: Legal and Financial Advisors

Attorney

Name:
Company:
Address:
Phone:
Email:

Accountant

Name:
Company:
Address:
Phone:
Email:

Location of **original** estate planning documents:

Will:

Trust:

Durable Power of Attorney:

Advanced Healthcare Directive:

HIPPA Waiver:

Other:

Location of **original** income tax documents and tax returns:

Investment Broker

Name:
Company:
Address:
Phone:
Email:

Guide to Important Personal and Financial Information

Part 4: Location of Personal Records

Birth Certificates:

Adoption papers:

Naturalization documents:

Marriage certificate:

Divorce decree:

Death certificate of predeceased spouse:

Social Security cards:

Medicare cards:

Passports:

Other:

Safe deposit box information:

Bank name:

Address:

Phone:

Box number:

Location of keys:

Part 5: Financial Assets

Bank accounts

Bank name:

Address:

Phone:

Email

Account number:

Password/Pin #

Guide to Important Personal and Financial Information

Part 5: Financial Assets (cont.)

Bank name:
Address:
Phone:
Email:
Account number:
Password/Pin#

Bank name:
Address:
Phone:
Email:
Account number:
Password/Pin#

Credit Cards (attach additional sheets as needed)

Credit card type:
Account number:
Customer service number:

Credit card type:
Account number:
Customer service number:

Credit card type:
Account number:
Customer service number:

Credit card type:
Account number:
Customer service number:

Credit card type:
Account number:
Customer service number:

Credit card type:
Account number:
Customer service number:

Credit card type:
Account number:
Customer service number:

Guide to Important Personal and Financial Information

Part 5: Financial Assets (cont.)

Investments

Brokerage account

Financial Institution:

Contact person:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

Account number(s):

Financial Institution:

Contact person:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

Account number(s):

Real Estate

Property location:

Location of deed:

Date purchased:

Property location:

Location of deed:

Date purchased:

Mortgages

Property location:

Date of loan:

Length of loan:

Name of lender:

Location of mortgage documents:

Property location:

Date of loan:

Length of loan:

Name of lender:

Location of mortgage documents:

Guide to Important Personal and Financial Information

Part 5: Financial Assets (cont.)

Life Insurance – attach copy of face page of each policy

Name of company:

Address:

Phone:

Policy number:

Location of original policy document:

Name of company:

Address:

Phone:

Policy number:

Location of original policy document:

Name of company:

Address:

Phone:

Policy number:

Location of original policy document:

Automobile Insurance

Vehicle description:

Name of company:

Address:

Phone:

Policy number:

Vehicle description:

Name of company:

Address:

Phone:

Policy number:

Homeowner's/Renter's Insurance- attach copy of Declarations page

Name of company:

Address:

Phone:

Policy number:

Guide to Important Personal and Financial Information

Part 5: Financial Assets (cont.)

Disability and Long-term Insurance – attach copy of face page of each policy

Name of company:

Address:

Phone:

Policy number:

Location of original policy:

Name of company:

Address:

Phone:

Policy number:

Location of original policy:

Name of company:

Address:

Phone:

Policy number:

Location of original policy:

Vehicles

Brand:

Model:

Year:

License plate:

Brand:

Model:

Year:

License plate:

Brand:

Model:

Year:

License plate:

Guide to Important Personal and Financial Information

Part 5: Financial Assets (cont.)

Jewelry (attach additional sheets as needed)

Description:

Location:

Description:

Location:

Description:

Location:

Description:

Location:

Description:

Location:

Description:

Location:

Description:

Location:

Art and Collectibles (attach additional sheets as needed)

Description:

Location:

Location of appraisal if available:

Description:

Location:

Location of appraisal if available:

Description:

Location:

Location of appraisal if available:

Description:

Location:

Location of appraisal if available:

Guide to Important Personal and Financial Information

Part 5: Financial Assets (cont.)

Other Personal Property

Description:

Location:

Description:

Location:

Description:

Location:

Retirement Accounts

401(k) Plans:

Plan administrator name:

Address:

Phone:

Account number:

Plan administrator name:

Address:

Phone:

Account number:

IRAs

Plan administrator name:

Address:

Phone:

Account number

Plan administrator name:

Address:

Phone:

Account number

Guide to Important Personal and Financial Information

Part 5: Financial Assets (cont.)

Annuities

Financial institution name:

Address:

Phone:

Financial institution name:

Address:

Phone:

Other Retirement Accounts/Pensions

Type of account:

Plan administrator name:

Address:

Phone:

Account number:

Type of account:

Plan Administrator name:

Address:

Phone:

Account number:

Part 6: Other Important Information

Funeral Arrangements/Pre-need Arrangements

Funeral home name:

Address:

Phone:

Contact person:

Cemetery name:

Address:

Phone:

Contact person:

APPENDIX – DIGITAL ESTATE INFORMATION SAMPLE FORM¹

DIGITAL ESTATE INFORMATION

I. LOCATIONS OF HARD COPY FILES AND MEDIA BACKUP

Personal records =

Financial =

Home/apartment records =

Media backups =

The location of traditional paper records as well as where back ups of digital information are stored is very helpful.

II. DEFAULT INFORMATION

User names =

Passwords =

Verification questions, e.g.,

Mother's maiden name =

Grade school =

Street where grew up =

Name of first pet =

Favorite color =

Many clients have default information which they use for many accounts. If no specific access information is provided, this at least provides a starting point.

Some clients may also have a method of assigning passwords. If so, the client should provide this information.

¹ For another sample form, see James D. Lamm, *Digital Audit: Passwords & Digital Property* (2012).

III. ELECTRONIC DEVICE ACCESS

<u>Device</u>	<u>Website</u>	<u>Username</u>	<u>PIN</u>	<u>Password</u>
Computer – home				
Computer – office				
Operating System				
Voice mail – home				
Voice mail – work				
Voice mail – cell phone				
Security system				
Tablet				
e-Reader				
GPS				
Router				
DVR/TiVo				
Television				

3 - 56

IV. E-MAIL ACCOUNTS

<u>Description</u>	<u>E-mail address</u>	<u>Username</u>	<u>PIN</u>	<u>Password</u>	<u>Disposition Desires</u>
Work					
Home					
School					

V. DOMAIN NAMES

<u>Website/Domain Name</u>	<u>Webhost</u>	<u>Username</u>	<u>PIN</u>	<u>Password</u>
Personal				
Business				

VI. ON-LINE STORAGE

<u>Name</u>	<u>Website</u>	<u>Username</u>	<u>PIN</u>	<u>Password</u>
Dropbox				
Google Drive				

3 - 57

VII. FINANCIAL SOFTWARE

<u>Item</u>	<u>Website</u>	<u>User Name</u>	<u>PIN</u>	<u>Password</u>
Quicken				
TurboTax				

VIII. BANKING

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Website</u>	<u>User Name</u>	<u>Password</u>	<u>ATM PIN</u>	<u>Security Image</u>
Checking					
Savings					
PayPal					

IX. STOCKS, BONDS, SECURITIES

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Website</u>	<u>User Name</u>	<u>Password</u>	<u>Other Information</u>

3 - 58

X. INCOME TAXES

<u>Item</u>	<u>Website</u>	<u>User Name</u>	<u>PIN</u>	<u>Password</u>
Federal Income tax payment	https://www.eftps.com/eftps/			
State Income tax payment				
Prior computerized tax returns				

XI. RETIREMENT

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Website</u>	<u>User Name</u>	<u>Password</u>	<u>Other Information</u>

XII. INSURANCE

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Website</u>	<u>User Name</u>	<u>Password</u>	<u>Other Information</u>
Health				
Life				
Property				

XIII. CREDIT CARDS

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Website</u>	<u>User Name</u>	<u>Password</u>	<u>PIN</u>
American Express				
Visa				

XIV. DEBTS

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Website</u>	<u>User Name</u>	<u>Password</u>	<u>Other Information</u>
Mortgage				
Cars				
Student Loan				

3 - 60

XV. UTILITIES

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Website</u>	<u>User Name</u>	<u>Password</u>	<u>Other Information</u>
Electric				
Gas				
Internet				
Phone(landline)				
Phone (cell)				
TV				
Trash				
Water				

XVI. BUSINESSES

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Website</u>	<u>User Name</u>	<u>Password</u>	<u>Other Information</u>
Amazon.com				
e-Bay.com				

3 - 61

XVII. SOCIAL NETWORKS

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Website</u>	<u>User Name</u>	<u>Password</u>	<u>Disposition Desires</u>
Facebook				
LinkedIn				
Twitter				
MySpace				

XVIII. DIGITAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Website</u>	<u>User Name</u>	<u>Password</u>	<u>Other Information</u>
Netflix				
iTunes				
YouTube				
Hulu				
Nook				
Kindle				

3 - 62

XIX. LOYALTY PROGRAMS

<u>Name</u>	<u>Website</u>	<u>User Name</u>	<u>Password</u>
Delta			
Southwest Airlines			
Best Buy			
Office Depot			

XX. OTHER ACCOUNTS

<u>Name</u>	<u>Website</u>	<u>User Name</u>	<u>Password</u>
Skype			
LoJack			
WoW			
HalfLife			
Flickr			
Medical records			

3 - 63