ESTATE PLANNING CONSULTATION CHECKLIST

8 Things to Think About Before Your First Meeting

You’ve decided it may be time to create or update your estate plan. Now what?

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Your first meeting with an estate planning attorney is just a conversation.

You don't need to show up with a perfect list of every account you own or know exactly which documents you need. Part of an attorney's job is to ask questions, explain your choices, and help you decide what makes sense for your family.

A little preparation can make that conversation even more useful. Start with these eight areas.

1 Think About Who Matters Most to You

Start with the people you want your estate plan to protect or provide for.

- [ ] Spouse or partner
- [ ] Children and grandchildren
- [ ] Parents or other relatives
- [ ] Friends
- [ ] Charities or organizations
- [ ] Anyone who depends on you financially

You may also want to think about backup choices. If the first person you name can't serve or receive an inheritance, who would you want next?

2 Think About Who You Trust to Make Decisions

An estate plan may ask you to name people for several important jobs. Depending on your plan, you may need to choose someone to:

- [ ] Handle your estate after your death
- [ ] Manage a trust
- [ ] Manage financial matters if you cannot
- [ ] Make health care decisions for you
- [ ] Care for minor children

These don't always have to be the same person. Think about who is responsible, dependable, and likely to follow your wishes.

> It can also help to identify backup decision makers in case your first choice isn't able.

3 Make a Basic List of What You Own

You don’t necessarily need exact values before your first meeting. A general picture can give your attorney a useful starting point.

Consider:

- [ ] Home and other real estate
- [ ] Retirement accounts
- [ ] Life insurance
- [ ] Vehicles
- [ ] Property in another state
- [ ] Bank accounts
- [ ] Investment accounts
- [ ] Business interests
- [ ] Valuable personal property
- [ ] Other major assets

If you own something with another person, make a note of that too. How an asset is titled may affect how it passes after death.

4 Review Your Beneficiary Designations

Some assets may pass according to a beneficiary form rather than instructions in a will.

This commonly includes retirement accounts and life insurance policies. Certain bank or investment accounts may also have named beneficiaries.

If possible, make a list of:

- [ ] Accounts with beneficiaries
- [ ] Who is currently named
- [ ] Any designations you are unsure about or may want to change

> Your attorney can help you look at how these choices may fit with the rest of your estate plan.

5 Think About How You Want an Inheritance Handled

You don't have to know every detail yet. Start with broad strokes.

Would you want your beneficiaries to receive property right away? Would you prefer to spread an inheritance out over time? Are there young children, beneficiaries with disabilities, or family circumstances that may need extra planning?

You may also want to consider:

- [ ] Specific gifts or family heirlooms
- [ ] Charitable gifts
- [ ] Special needs planning
- [ ] Different plans for different beneficiaries
- [ ] Money for education
- [ ] Concerns about how an inheritance could be managed

These are exactly the kinds of choices an estate planning attorney can help you think through.

6 Consider Any Family Situations You Want to Discuss

Every family works differently. Your attorney needs to know what yours looks like.

Make a note of anything that may affect your planning, including:

- [ ] A blended family
- [ ] A beneficiary with special needs
- [ ] Someone you do or do not want involved in decision-making
- [ ] Concerns about future disagreements
- [ ] Minor children
- [ ] Family members who do not get along
- [ ] A family business

> Good planning may reduce opportunities for confusion or conflict later. You can discuss sensitive issues privately with your attorney.

7 Gather Any Estate Planning Documents You Already Have

If you have an existing estate plan, bring it with you, even if it is old.

Helpful documents may include:

- [ ] Will
- [ ] Power of attorney
- [ ] Living will or advance directive
- [ ] Beneficiary designation information
- [ ] Business ownership or succession documents
- [ ] Trust
- [ ] Health care documents
- [ ] Deeds
- [ ] Prenuptial or postnuptial agreement

Recent account statements may also be helpful in some cases.

> **Don't worry if you can't find everything right away.** Your attorney can tell you what additional information may be useful after the meeting.

8 Write Down Your Questions

This may be the most useful thing you bring.

What has been keeping you from creating your estate plan? What are you worried could happen? What would make you feel confident that your family is prepared?

Write those questions down. You might ask:

- Do I need a will, a trust, or both?
- What happens to my home?
- How can I make things easier for my family?
- Who should I name to handle my affairs?
- How do I plan for children or grandchildren?
- Do my current documents still work for my family?
- What happens after my estate plan is signed?
- If I create a trust, how do my assets get transferred into it?

— YOUR NEXT STEP

You Don’t Have to Figure It Out Before the Meeting

Estate planning can involve decisions you have never had to make before. You’re allowed to ask questions.

Reed & Thompson, PLLC offers complimentary estate planning consultations for people who are ready to begin planning, want to review documents they already have, or simply want to learn what their options may be.

Schedule a Complimentary Consultation

Schedule through the Reed & Thompson contact page, email **office@reedthompsonlaw.com**, or call the office nearest you.

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This checklist is provided for general educational purposes and does not constitute legal advice. The documents and planning options that may be appropriate will depend on your individual circumstances.