

# Your Planning Checklist

A guide to staying ahead of life's changes



## You owe it to yourself and to your family to make sure you are prepared for life's changes.

Having an outdated will and other important planning documents—or no documents at all—can lead to unexpected tax burdens, assets falling into the wrong hands, and other problems for your loved ones.

Whether you are thinking about creating your first will and other important planning documents or already have them in place, **we recommend asking yourself these simple questions every year** to make sure your plan addresses your current situation and wishes. If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, it’s time to create or update your plan.

### 1. **Have you welcomed a new child, grandchild, or great-grandchild?**

If so, consider adding them as beneficiaries.

### 2. **Has your marital status changed?**

If you are recently married, you can name your spouse as a beneficiary. The beneficiary status of former spouses varies from state to state. If you are recently divorced, check your state’s laws.

### 3. **Have you moved to a new state?**

State laws vary regarding asset distribution after death, as well as related taxes. Each state also has its own formula for determining who receives assets in the absence of a will. Be sure to work with an experienced attorney in your new home state.

### 4. **Has your health status changed?**

The diagnosis of a serious illness is a major event in any family, but having a plan in place can serve as a comfort. A living will—a critical planning component—informs your healthcare providers about your wishes and gives you the legal right to empower others to speak for you when you cannot speak for yourself.

### 5. **Have you changed jobs or rolled over a retirement account?**

Beneficiaries listed on employment-related retirement plans and life insurance policies lose their claim when you move to another plan—so be sure to update your named beneficiaries in any rollover. Additionally, if your salary has increased, you may want to review and adjust your beneficiary distributions.

### 6. **Do you need to update the people designated to act on your behalf?**

Selecting a guardian for minor children, choosing an agent to act on your behalf for financial and healthcare decisions, and naming an executor/trustee in your will/trust to carry out your final wishes are crucial decisions you must make as part of comprehensive planning.

### 7. **Have your financial institutions changed ownership?**

Beneficiary designations are sometimes lost when financial institutions merge. If your bank, brokerage, or mutual fund has been purchased, be sure to check that your beneficiaries are still valid.



8. **Are you wondering how taxes might affect your estate?**

Even if you do not expect to owe any Federal estate tax, remember that both federal and state tax laws affect your estate. It's important to know the current tax laws and how they affect your estate and distribution to your heirs.

9. **Do you have a plan for your digital assets?**

You may not think of your Facebook photos or email accounts as something to be considered in the context of will planning, but without your account login information, the people settling your affairs will encounter delays and difficulties. The most prudent step for protecting your online assets is to consult an estate planning attorney who is up to date on the laws in your state and familiar with the terms of service for the most frequently used online providers.

10. **Has it been three or more years since you reviewed your plans?**

In addition to a change in your personal circumstances, state and federal laws are altered over time. A good rule of thumb is to review your plans every three years

11. **Have you decided to name a charitable beneficiary in your plans?**

Many people leave gifts to charities that are important to them. We hope you will consider leaving a gift to the National Audubon Society. Most gifts cost you nothing now, require no minimum contribution, and allow you to change beneficiaries at any time. A thoughtful plan means you can provide for family *and* leave a percentage or specific amount to protect the birds you love.

**How to say it:**

"I bequeath (dollar amount or % of estate) to the National Audubon Society, Inc., a not-for-profit organization, with its principal offices located at 225 Varick Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10014, for its ongoing environmental conservation and education purposes (or "for programs in the state of"). Tax ID # 13-1624102.

## Your Gift, Your Way

We would be happy to assist you as you consider including a gift for Audubon in your will or trust—and we understand that this decision takes careful consideration.

Audubon welcomes both unrestricted gifts and those designated for a specific program. Unrestricted gifts enable Audubon to address the most urgent needs and opportunities facing birds and the environment. If you prefer to designate your gift to a particular program, please contact us to discuss your objectives.

If you have already left a gift to Audubon, please let us know. We would like to thank you and welcome you to the Grinnell Society. It's our way of recognizing the exceptional individuals who have made Audubon a part of their lasting legacy. We would also like to work with you to document how you would like your gift to be used, to ensure that we honor your wishes.

## Contact Us

For assistance in crafting your legacy, or to notify us of a gift in your will you have already left to Audubon, contact us at [plannedgifts@audubon.org](mailto:plannedgifts@audubon.org).



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You may also download our complimentary planning publications at:

[www.audubon.org/planning](http://www.audubon.org/planning)

**Audubon protects birds and the places they need,  
today and tomorrow.**



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