Estate document checklist

Gather the records

Use this list to gather records and track requests after a death. Not every document applies to every estate or claimant. The court, bank, or benefit provider determines what it needs.

Start with the records you have

- [ ] **Death certificate**
  Locate it and ask each recipient whether it needs a certified copy, an ordinary copy, or particular details.
- [ ] **Your identification**
  Have current government identification ready for institutions that need to verify the claimant.
- [ ] **Will and trust records**
  Locate the signed documents and any amendments. Note where originals are held.
- [ ] **Account and policy statements**
  Identify the institution, product, and ownership or beneficiary information available.
- [ ] **Employer and pension records**
  List each benefits office or retirement system. A pension claim may be separate from life insurance.

Match documents to your role

- [ ] **Court appointment, if acting for a probate estate**
  Locate issued Letters and any court restrictions. A will naming you executor is not issued Letters.
- [ ] **Trust authority, if acting as trustee**
  Ask which trust document or certification the institution needs for this account.
- [ ] **Beneficiary or survivor claim packet**
  Request the form for your role. An estate-account opening form may not be the right claim form.
- [ ] **Relationship records, when requested**
  Gather relevant marriage, partnership, birth, divorce, or prior-death records for the claim.
- [ ] **Small-estate affidavit, if eligible**
  Confirm the state procedure, wait, value limit, signatures, and required attachments before using it.

Preparation aid only. Not every item is required. Do not write passwords, Social Security numbers, or full account numbers here.

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Submit and follow through

Use a separate copy for each institution. Check off an item only when you have completed the step; record follow-up details in your secure case log.

Prepare each submission

- ☐ **Estate EIN, if opening an estate account**
  Keep the IRS confirmation with the estate banking records. It does not replace court authority.
- ☐ **Institution-specific document list**
  Ask which records are required, which must be certified, and whether any must be recently issued.
- ☐ **Correct recipient and submission route**
  Confirm the bank, agency, or caseworker and its current delivery instructions.
- ☐ **Complete forms and signatures**
  Check every applicable section and the claimant name before submitting.
- ☐ **Copy of the submitted packet**
  Retain the forms, attachments, and delivery evidence so a follow-up can identify what was sent.

Track what remains

- ☐ **Notification confirmation**
  Record the report date and reference number. Reporting a death may not complete a claim.
- ☐ **Application receipt**
  Confirm the claim arrived and ask whether it is complete.
- ☐ **Missing-record request**
  Write down the exact item, who will obtain it, and the next follow-up date.
- ☐ **Decision and payment records**
  Keep benefit decisions, transfer confirmations, final statements, and related tax documents.
- ☐ **Safe document storage**
  Store identifying records securely. Use this checklist for status, not passwords or full account numbers.

Official references: California Courts (DE-150 and small-estate guidance), IRS (EIN), CalPERS, CalSTRS, and OPM. Current source links and detailed guides: