

# Personal Planning for Today and Beyond

Andi Hoover, WVU Extension Agent – Greenbrier County

---

## Educational Objectives

- Make a "My Life Binder" for important documents.
- Learn what information is needed to plan for the future.
- Gain an understanding of estate planning and legal documents.

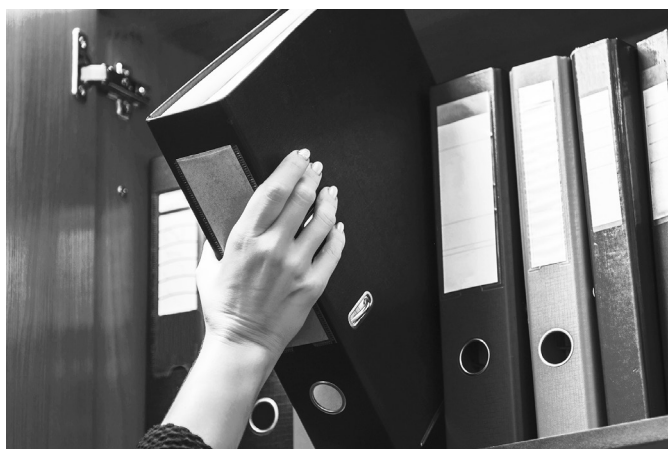
No one wants to think of dying and leaving your family, and it's not an easy topic to discuss.

As we age, our mind will not be as sharp as it once was, and we may need a caretaker to assist us. Planning for the future, including death or incapacitation,

it's important to have plans in place. While able, it is time to get your affairs in order and provide loved ones with a guide to help maneuver the business aspect of someone's passing or someone not being able to care for themselves. When emotions take over and grief makes daily tasks unbearable, loved ones can find peace knowing that you took time to have your documents together and a plan for your family to follow.

Thinking about end-of-life plans can be overwhelming and heart breaking. Getting started is the hardest part, so where do you begin? How can you organize it to make sense to others? Following these simple steps and completing sections in your "My Life Binder" will help give your family the information needed for a smooth transition.

1. Prepare your My Life Binder. Find a large binder or filing cabinet to store your important papers. Make tabs for each section discussed below. Begin to track down all the information needed to complete the binder. You can use forms downloaded from the internet, or complete the information with hand written notes.
2. Decide where to keep this binder and all original copies. Legal documents such as a will or power of attorney (POA) require the



– continued –

original copies, and those should be stored in a fireproof and lockable container such as a fireproof, waterproof safe or safety deposit box at the bank.



3. Start working on each section of the planner. If it feels overwhelming, try to complete two documents a week until you feel more comfortable, then work up to one document a day, if possible. Start with the simplest sections; completing these documents will motivate you to keep going. It can be frustrating to hunt down documents, but your family will appreciate it.
4. Talk to your loved ones. It is important that they know your wishes and can access this binder. The person you leave in charge will need to know how to access your home or safety deposit box, keys, passwords and codes.
5. Remember to update your planner when changes are made.

## Sections to Include in the Planner

There are several sections personal information will fall under. Some may not be applicable, but most are general information that loved ones will need to know.

**Biographical Information:** This includes information such as your full name, date of birth, location of birth, birth certificate, social security

number, driver's license number, military service, marriages, marriage certificates, divorce information and death certificates of partner and children if applicable. In this section, the same information should be recorded for partner/spouse, children and siblings.

**Young Children:** Naming a guardian for young children can solve several arguments and help the grieving child feel safe and secure knowing there is someone who will take care of them. It is recommended to seek a lawyer's advice to ensure it is done correctly and legally.

**Pets:** Listing your pets, along with any identifying information, the name of the veterinarian, type of food, feeding schedule, medications and health issues will help others care for your animals.

**Employment:** Recording employment history, dates, positions held, retirement or investments will help others to find any monies due to your estate.

**Business Interests:** If you were in business for yourself, list the business name, address, financial and banking information, loans, deeds, insurance, taxes and employees.



**Service Providers:** List anyone who assists you with care such as a home health company, housekeeper, yard caretaker, driver and others who may provide service to you.

**Health Care Directives:** If you become incapacitated and unable to speak for yourself, it is important to name someone you trust to be



your health care agent. This person will become the medical power of attorney (POA) and make decisions regarding your care. It is helpful to list alternates in case the person you chose is unable to perform this task. The POA is a legal document that must be notarized. Documents in the section will cover all doctors and why you see them, medications, allergies and illnesses, as well as your wishes regarding end-of-life decisions and organ donation.

**Power of Attorney for Finances:** The medical POA is different than that of finances. They are two different legal documents. You can have the same person serve in each role, however there are two different forms that must be filled out and notarized. The POA for finances named will handle all financial affairs.



**Estate Planning:** Documents such as a will, trust, beneficiaries and property agreements will go in this section. It is extremely important to list items that go to certain people. The executor of your estate will carry out your wishes, which will lessen family arguments. The original will should be kept in a secure place; it must be taken to the county probate to be filed upon death.

**Insurance:** Health, life and property insurance will be part of your estate, so make sure to list/update beneficiaries for each policy. The executor or POA will claim, modify or cancel insurance policies, as needed.

**Banking Information:** List each bank and every account you have. This includes all checking, savings, investments, loans and credit/debit cards. The account names and numbers should be recorded. Talk with your bank regarding “transfer upon death” accounts and check to make sure you have a beneficiary on each account. Loans and debts will need to be paid and credit cards cancelled. Check bank statements for any autopay or deposits before closing accounts.

**Retirement, Pensions, Inheritance and Government Benefits:** File all retirement plans here. Seeking a lawyer’s advice for IRAs and money that may be transferred to someone else is recommended. Taxes and value of policies can be affected if they are not handled properly. Medicare and social security information needs will also be filed here.

**Real Estate, Vehicles and Personal Property:** File copies of all deeds and titles for personal property. The county assessor’s office should be able to give you a printout of all property in your name. When your estate goes to probate, the executor will need this information.

**Taxes:** File the last 3-5 years of tax forms here. Having this information will help your executor complete forms if you are incapacitated.

**Secured Places and Passwords:** This section will need updated frequently as passwords change. Make a list of all websites, accounts (including social media accounts), usernames and passwords for anything you do online. These will need to be shut down. Secured places such as a home safe or safety deposit box, should be listed in this section along with the code or key to open them.

**Memberships and Community Work:** Groups that you are a part of should be listed here. The members of these associations can offer support for family members and could be included in an obituary. Memberships often have yearly dues to pay, and if these are paid via automatic payment, payments will need to stop if you are no longer able to be a member.



**Burial or Cremation and Services:** Outline your wishes and any arrangements you have made. If you have pre-paid for services or burial spots, that information should be stored here. Include information such as wishes for cremation, where your ashes are to be stored and whether or not you have already picked out an urn. If you are to be buried, information should include the type of casket you would want, what clothes or accessories you want to be buried in, what type of headstone you want (many cemeteries have rules regarding headstones), who will perform the service, etc. These are general questions that can be answered by you now, along with writing a draft obituary, to take the burden off loved ones.

**Miscellaneous:** This section will include anything else you may want others to know.

Although this list may seem overwhelming and putting your affairs in order is not fun to do, it is important for your loved ones. Answering these questions and keeping the information organized will allow others to follow your wishes and have time to reflect on good memories. It can also reduce sibling arguments over what they think you might have wanted as well as the stress of taking care of an estate. The National Institute on Aging has free publications that can help you and your loved ones discuss end of life issues.

## Club Activity

Have each participant bring a binder and 18 dividers with a three-hole punch.

Have participants make tabs for their binder using the topic headings listed above.

Contact your local WVU Extension office for copies of forms, if needed.

## References

Cullen, M., & Irving, S. (September 2020). *Get It Together Organize Your Records So Your Family Won't Have To*. USA: NOLO.

Goyer, A. (2016, October 20). AARP. Retrieved from Legal Preparations for Caregiving: [www.aarp.org/caregiving/financial-legal/info-2017/legal-preparations-ag.html?cmp=RDRCT-825ffe1a-20200402](http://www.aarp.org/caregiving/financial-legal/info-2017/legal-preparations-ag.html?cmp=RDRCT-825ffe1a-20200402)

Services, U. D. (2018, June 1). National Institute on Aging. Retrieved from Advance Care Planning: [www.nia.nih.gov/health/getting-your-affairs-order](http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/getting-your-affairs-order)