Top 12 Tasks for Successor Trustees

A simple checklist for trustees after death

1. Get death certificates and documents.
   Order 3-5 certified death certificates and gather the trust, any amendments, and related estate planning documents.
2. Confirm you are the trustee.
   Check the trust to confirm that you are the named successor trustee and note any co-trustees.
3. Read the trust.
   Identify the beneficiaries, what each person is to receive, and any special instructions.
4. Make a list of trust assets.
   List bank accounts, investments, real estate, business interests, and valuable personal property owned by the trust.
5. Protect the assets.
   Secure property, maintain insurance, and keep trust property separate from your own property.
6. Start a trustee file.
   Keep copies of statements, bills, receipts, deposits, and payments from the beginning.
7. Notify beneficiaries.
   Let beneficiaries know you are serving as trustee and that the administration process has started.
8. Identify bills and expenses.
   Gather information about debts, funeral expenses, utilities, taxes, insurance, and other ongoing costs.
9. Get professional help when needed.
   Work with an attorney or tax professional on legal notices, tax filings, and questions about your duties.
10. Keep good records during administration.
    Document major decisions, asset sales, payments, and distributions.
11. Distribute assets only when ready.
    Wait until the trust is ready for final distributions, then document what each beneficiary receives.
12. Close and store the file.
    After all tasks are complete, close any trust account and keep the trust records in a safe place.

Serving as trustee can be a big responsibility. If you need help understanding your duties or moving the administration forward, contact OC Elder Law for guidance on California trust administration.