



The Navigator



Wealth
Management

INVESTMENT, TAX AND LIFESTYLE PERSPECTIVES FROM RBC WEALTH MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Professional corporations

Is incorporating your professional practice right for you?

The federal government has proposed changes which target private corporations. Generally, effective for 2018 and later taxation years, the government has proposed to limit income splitting to family members receiving “reasonable” compensation from a private corporation. The proposed measures extend the tax on split income rules (often known as “kiddie tax”) to adults.

The government also intends to eliminate the tax advantage of investing undistributed earnings from an active business in a private corporation. Details of this proposed measure will be released in draft legislation as part of the 2018 federal budget. If enacted, this measure may result in a disincentive for investing passively within a corporation.

The strategies discussed in this article may be affected by the proposed measures. If you are an owner of a private corporation, you should consider the potential impact of the proposed measures and discuss the implications with your qualified tax advisor.

As a sole proprietor, you may be wondering whether to incorporate your practice or not. While incorporating is good for some, not all practices will necessarily benefit from this corporate structure. If you are considering incorporating your practice, you should take the time to learn about the possible advantages and drawbacks of incorporation. This article highlights some of the points you may want to review when determining whether to incorporate your practice.

The terms ‘corporation’ and ‘company’ are used interchangeably to refer to a Canadian-controlled private corporation (CCPC) in this article. In simple terms, a CCPC is a Canadian corporation that is not controlled by a non-resident of Canada or a public corporation or a combination of both. In addition, no class of shares of a CCPC can be listed on a designated stock exchange.

What is incorporation?

The act of incorporating creates a new legal entity. Your corporation will have certain rights and obligations, including the ability to acquire assets, obtain a

loan, enter into contracts, incur legal liability and carry on a business. Once you incorporate, the corporation’s assets belong to the corporation and not to its shareholders.

Please contact us for more information about the topics discussed in this article.

By incorporating and earning professional income within your corporation, you can defer personal taxation on the after-tax professional income until the time you withdraw it from your corporation. Generally, the longer you can leave the funds in your corporation, the greater the deferral advantage will be.

What is a professional corporation?

A professional corporation is a corporation owned and operated by one or more members of the same profession. Only members of certain professions, such as physicians, lawyers, accountants and dentists can operate a professional corporation. The services provided by the corporation are generally restricted to the practice of the profession.

Professional corporations are allowed in every province and territory across Canada. In each jurisdiction, the professional regulatory body usually determines whether its members may incorporate. For example, the regulatory body for physicians, in all provinces and territories, allows physicians to incorporate.

How does a professional corporation differ from a regular corporation?

Although the tax law does not distinguish between a professional corporation and a regular corporation, there are some significant differences between the two:

- In many, but not all provinces and territories, only members of the same profession can be voting shareholders of a professional corporation. Each profession in each province or territory has specific rules as to who can hold the shares of a professional corporation. For example, these rules could state whether the shares can be held by a holding company, family members or a family trust.
- The officers and directors of a professional corporation must generally be shareholders of the corporation as well.
- The professional corporation is generally subject to the investigative and regulatory powers of the regulatory body governing the profession.
- A professional corporation will

not protect a professional against personal liability for professional negligence.

Because of these differences, some of the benefits commonly associated with a corporation may have a limited application for a professional corporation. The advantages of incorporating and the restrictions placed on professional corporations are further explained below.

Advantages of incorporation

There are several potential advantages to incorporating your professional practice. The following is a non-exhaustive list of these advantages:

Tax deferral

Perhaps the most significant advantage of operating your practice within a corporation is the ability to defer taxes. This is because professional income earned within a corporation is taxed at two levels – once at the corporate level and then again at the personal level when the income is distributed. By incorporating and earning professional income within your corporation, you can defer personal taxation on the after-tax professional income until the time you withdraw it from your corporation. Generally, the longer you can leave the funds in your corporation, the greater the deferral advantage will be.

This tax deferral is available because income earned from operating your practice within a corporation may be taxed at lower corporate tax rates. The taxable income you earn from your practice while operating as a sole proprietor is taxed at your individual marginal tax rate. However, if the professional income is instead earned by your corporation, the taxable income may be considered active business income (ABI) for tax purposes and be subject to a general federal corporate tax rate of 15% and the applicable provincial or territorial corporate tax rate.



You may enjoy a significant tax break on the capital gains you realize on the disposition of certain private company shares. Each individual resident in Canada can claim a LCGE to shelter capital gains on the disposition of qualified small business corporation (QSBC) shares.

Further, if your corporation is a CCPC throughout the tax year, your corporation may benefit from the small business deduction (SBD) which lowers the federal tax rate to 10.5% on its first \$500,000 of ABI. All provinces and territories also provide a SBD and have a small business limit of \$500,000, except for Manitoba which has a limit of \$450,000. Both the federal and provincial small business limits must be shared by associated CCPCs. Associated corporations are defined in the Income Tax Act (Act). The definition is complex and is beyond the scope of this article.

While the combined corporate federal and provincial general rate and small business tax rates vary by province and territory, the corporate tax rate on professional income is generally lower than your personal marginal tax rate. As such, earning professional income inside your corporation may result in less immediate taxes payable, allowing more after-tax funds to accumulate within your corporation, which can then be used to invest and earn additional income.¹

Income splitting opportunities

Incorporating your practice may allow you to take advantage of income splitting opportunities. By having lower income adult family members as shareholders, the incorporated business can pay them dividends to take advantage of their lower marginal tax rates (sometimes referred to as “dividend sprinkling”¹). This strategy may be less applicable to professional corporations situated in provinces or territories where share

ownership is restricted to members of a particular profession.

Note that dividends from private corporations paid to your minor children may be subject to “kiddie tax”. Kiddie tax may apply when a minor child receives a dividend from a private corporation. The dividend is taxed at the highest personal tax rate regardless of the child’s marginal tax rate. The child will only be able to claim the dividend tax credit and cannot use other tax credits such as the basic personal exemption to offset the taxes payable on the dividend.

The process of making family members shareholders of your corporation is complex and may result in immediate tax consequences. Speak a qualified tax and legal advisor for more information regarding this strategy.

You can also split income with family members using other methods that do not require you to incorporate your practice or add them as shareholders of your corporation. For example, you can have your corporation pay reasonable salaries to your family members for the services they provide. This strategy allows you to take advantage of your family members’ lower marginal tax rates while generating RRSP contribution room for them at the same time. Your corporation can claim a deduction for the reasonable salaries paid.

The Lifetime Capital Gains Exemption (LCGE)

You may enjoy a significant tax break on the capital gains you realize on the disposition of certain private company shares. Each individual resident in Canada can claim a LCGE to shelter capital gains on the disposition of qualified small business corporation (QSBC) shares. The LCGE was increased in 2014 to \$800,000 for dispositions of QSBC shares and is indexed for years after 2014 (you can find the current

¹) In the 2017 federal budget, the government identified certain strategies involving private corporations that they believe provide an unfair tax advantage to high-income individuals. One of these strategies involves holding a passive investment portfolio inside a private corporation. Another involves dividend sprinkling (directing dividends that would otherwise be taxed in the hands of an individual at a high tax rate to family members who are subject to a lower tax rate or who may not be taxable at all). The government intends to release a paper in the coming months setting out the nature of these issues in more detail as well as proposed policy responses.

By incorporating your practice, you gain access to certain types of employee benefits or retirement savings plans, such as an Individual Pension Plan (IPP) and a Retirement Compensation Arrangement (RCA) that would otherwise not be available if you were a sole proprietor or a partner in a partnership.

year LCGE on the Canada Revenue Agency's (CRA) website). Therefore, incorporating your practice may enable you to sell your practice and shelter the growth from tax, up to the LCGE limit. Please note that the ability to sell the shares of your professional practice might be a more limited due to the requirement that voting shares generally have to be owned by individuals of the same profession.

You and your family may be able to multiply the LCGE available on the disposition of QSBC shares if you and your family members own shares of your professional corporation, directly or indirectly. For example, instead of only being able to claim one LCGE, assuming the LCGE is \$800,000, a family of four can shelter \$3.2 million of capital gains, resulting in significant tax savings. Please note that if you multiply the LCGE with your family members, they become entitled to some of the proceeds of sale. It is important that this is your intention when contemplating such planning. Again, the benefits of this strategy may be limited for professional corporations situated in provinces or territories where share ownership is restricted to members of a particular profession.

For more information regarding the types of shares that qualify as QSBC shares, please ask an RBC advisor for our article on the capital gains exemption on private shares. Also speak to a qualified tax advisor if you are a sole proprietor and planning to sell your practice since you may be able to claim the LCGE by transferring all or substantially all of your professional assets into a corporation and immediately selling the shares of the newly formed professional corporation.

Flexibility in remuneration

By incorporating your practice, you gain access to use a combination of different forms of remuneration,

including salary, dividends, and bonuses. The ability to choose the type and amount of remuneration may allow you to maximize tax deferral while still taking advantage of benefits such as creating Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) contribution room and participating in the Canada Pension Plan or the Quebec Pension Plan.

Flexibility in employee benefits

By incorporating your practice, you gain access to certain types of employee benefits or retirement savings plans, such as an Individual Pension Plan (IPP) and a Retirement Compensation Arrangement (RCA) that would otherwise not be available if you were a sole proprietor or a partner in a partnership.

Implementing an IPP

An IPP is a defined benefit pension plan that a corporation can establish for its owner or key employees. An IPP may be ideally suited for individuals over the age of 40 who earn a substantial amount of employment income. It is usually established for one individual member, say yourself as the practice owner, but the benefits can be extended to your spouse and other family members if they are also employed by your corporation. In certain situations, an IPP can provide greater annual contribution room than an RRSP.

Contributions to an IPP provide an immediate tax deduction to your company and are exempt from payroll and healthcare taxes. You will not pay personal tax on the contributions until you receive the benefit in a future year (potentially when you are in a lower tax bracket). In addition, you may be able to split your IPP retirement benefits with your spouse, which may further lower your family's overall tax bill.

Lastly, in the event that you or your practice run into financial trouble, the assets in the IPP are generally

When the professional dies or no longer practices, (assuming there are no other professional shareholders), the corporation would lose its status as a professional corporation unless another individual of the same profession purchases the shares. This does not mean that the corporation would have to be wound up. It may continue to exist as a regular corporation.

protected from creditors. This may allow you to set aside significant amounts of tax-deferred income for your retirement while having the assets protected from corporate creditors. Speak with a qualified legal advisor before implementing any creditor protection strategies.

Implementing an RCA

An RCA can provide you with supplemental pension benefits so that you may maintain your standard of living in retirement. Typically, an RCA is part of a retirement plan, which may also include a Registered Pension Plan (RPP) such as an IPP set-up by the company. An RCA may also provide pension benefits where a company does not have an RPP.

Contributions to an RCA provide an immediate tax deduction to your company and there is no upper limit on the amounts that you or your company can contribute to the plan, provided the amounts are “reasonable”. Please keep in mind that the contributions to the RCA (and any income or realized capital gains in the RCA) are subject to a 50% refundable tax. This means that the amount of funds available for investment may be significantly less in the RCA than if the funds are left in the corporation to invest or in an IPP.

You will not be taxed on the contributions until you receive the benefit in a future year (potentially when you are in a lower tax bracket) but the distributions are considered “other income”, as opposed to employment income, so they do not create RRSP contribution room. In addition, you may be able to split your RCA income with your spouse in retirement, subject to a limit.

Lastly, like IPPs, RCAs may provide a level of protection from your business’s creditors. Speak with a qualified legal advisor before implementing any creditor protection strategies.

Limited liability

Incorporation limits the liability of a corporation’s shareholders. This means that, generally, the shareholders of a corporation are not responsible for the corporation’s liabilities unless they have provided a personal guarantee.

That said, a professional corporation does not generally protect you from personal liability for professional negligence. In addition, if a shareholder is also a director, that person could be liable for the professional corporation’s liabilities (which may include unpaid wages and payroll taxes) in their capacity as a director.

Period of existence

If you operated your practice as a sole proprietor or a partnership, your business would cease to exist upon your death. On the other hand, if you incorporated, your corporation would continue to exist even if every shareholder and director were to die. However, it is important to keep in mind that there may be restrictions on who can own the voting shares of a professional corporation. Generally, voting shares have to be owned by individuals of the same profession and the corporation may not carry on a business other than the practice of the profession. When the professional dies or no longer practices, (assuming there are no other professional shareholders), the corporation would lose its status as a professional corporation unless another individual of the same profession purchases the shares. This does not mean that the corporation would have to be wound up. It may continue to exist as a regular corporation.

Disadvantages of incorporation

While incorporating your practice may provide certain advantages, you may need to weigh these benefits against the potential disadvantages of incorporating, such as the initial



All the professional income you earn as a sole proprietor is taxed in your hands annually. As such, you can use the after-tax profits however you wish. On the other hand, if you incorporate your business, the after-tax profits belong to the professional corporation and you cannot use the corporate funds for personal expenses unless you first withdraw the money from the corporation.

and on-going accounting and legal costs of incorporation. Some of the drawbacks of incorporating your business are discussed below:

Increased complexity and cost

A corporation is a separate legal entity and has no physical form. As such, the corporation needs individuals (such as shareholders, directors and officers) to carry out the business activities on its behalf. This business structure is more complex. In addition, operating your practice through a corporation may require you to adhere to a number of corporate formalities. For example, regardless of whether you are the sole owner or one of many owners of your incorporated practice, the directors of the corporation will still need to pass a resolution to declare and pay dividends.

A corporation is also subject to greater regulation and compliance than a sole proprietorship or partnership. For instance, your corporation will have to hold annual shareholder meetings and maintain corporate records. If there are any changes to the board of directors, your corporation will have to file notices with the government.

The administrative, legal and accounting costs associated with establishing and maintaining a corporation are also usually higher than those of a sole proprietorship or partnership. When setting up the corporation, your incorporated business must file certain documents with the government including articles of incorporation. If you ever make changes to the structure of your corporation, articles of amendment will need to be filed as well.

In terms ongoing professional fees, your corporation will incur more costs to file an annual corporate tax return and T5 slips for dividends.

Restricted use of business losses

Generally, in the first few years of

operation, a practice can generate losses due to high start-up costs and/or building a client base. As a sole proprietor, you may use any professional losses to offset your personal income from other sources. However, once you have incorporated, any losses realized in the corporation must be applied against the corporation's income and cannot be used to offset your personal income.

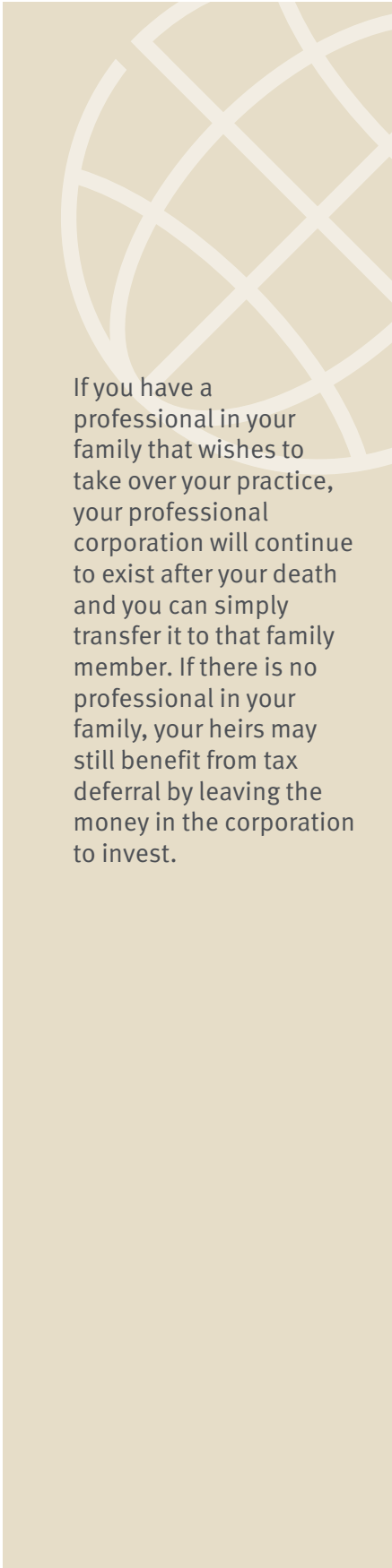
Whether you incur these losses as a sole proprietor or through your corporation, if you cannot use the losses in the year they are incurred, they are not completely lost. Professional losses can generally be carried back three years and forward for 20 years to use against past or future income.

Restricted personal use of corporate funds

All the professional income you earn as a sole proprietor is taxed in your hands annually. As such, you can use the after-tax profits however you wish. On the other hand, if you incorporate your business, the after-tax profits belong to the professional corporation and you cannot use the corporate funds for personal expenses unless you first withdraw the money from the corporation. Depending on how you withdraw funds from the corporation (e.g., as salary, bonus or dividend), you will face different tax implications on the withdrawal.

Taxes at death

If you own shares of your corporation, you may be subject to double taxation on death. First, you are taxed on the capital gain arising from the deemed disposition of your shares at death. Then, if you wind up your company or the company makes distributions to its shareholders in the future, a second level of tax is triggered. Alternatively, a redemption of the shares by your estate or your beneficiaries may result in a taxable dividend.



If you have a professional in your family that wishes to take over your practice, your professional corporation will continue to exist after your death and you can simply transfer it to that family member. If there is no professional in your family, your heirs may still benefit from tax deferral by leaving the money in the corporation to invest.

It is possible to defer this potential double tax by transferring the shares of your company to a surviving spouse or qualifying spousal trust on a tax-deferred basis. There are also other post-mortem planning alternatives that may eliminate this double taxation. For more information on strategies that may mitigate this double tax exposure, talk to your qualified tax advisor.

Should you incorporate?

After familiarizing yourself with some of the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating, here are some questions you can consider when determining whether you should incorporate your professional practice:

Do you need a substantial portion of your professional income to fund your annual living expenses and meet your financial goals?

If so, incorporating your practice may not make sense. You may not be able to benefit from the tax deferral advantage a corporation can offer if you need to receive a significant amount of the corporation's income as salary or dividends to support your living expenses. Keep in mind that using corporate assets to fund personal expenses can result in negative tax consequences unless you first withdraw the money from the corporation.

Is your practice profitable enough?

If your practice is in the early stages and currently generating losses, you might consider delaying incorporation. As a sole proprietor, it might be beneficial for you to use the professional losses against your personal income from other sources.

Is your practice producing more income than it needs to operate?

If so, incorporating your practice may make sense for you. You may be able to take advantage of the lower corporate tax rates as well as the tax deferral advantage by leaving the

after-tax business income in the professional corporation until you need it. Alternatively, you may be able to benefit from income splitting opportunities such as paying your adult family members dividends to take advantage of their lower marginal tax rates. Speak with your professional tax advisor to see if you can benefit from income splitting in your province or territory of residence.

Do you need additional money to supplement your retirement?

If so, incorporating your practice may make sense for you. By incorporating, you have increased flexibility in choosing the type and amount of remuneration you receive in retirement. For example, you can choose to leave the funds in your corporation for investing or have your corporation set up an IPP or RCA which can provide you with supplemental pension benefits allowing you to maintain your standard of living in retirement.

Do you need to consider the succession of your practice?

If so, incorporating your practice may make sense for you. If you have a professional in your family that wishes to take over your practice, your professional corporation will continue to exist after your death and you can simply transfer it to that family member. If there is no professional in your family, your heirs may still benefit from tax deferral by leaving the money in the corporation to invest. Alternatively, if you plan on selling your practice, you might be able to use the LCGE to eliminate the tax on all or a portion of the gain on the sale.

Conclusion

Determining how to structure your practice is an important decision that may have a significant impact on your practice going forward. Speak with a qualified tax and legal advisor to ensure that you have taken into account all of your

Please contact us for more information about the topics discussed in this article.

circumstances before deciding whether or not to incorporate.

This article may outline strategies, not all of which will apply to your particular financial circumstances. The information in this article is not intended to provide legal or tax advice.

To ensure that your own circumstances have been properly considered and that action is taken based on the latest information available, you should obtain professional advice from a qualified legal and/or tax advisor before acting on any of the information in this article.



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