

RI Notary Public FAQs

The questions listed below are general questions you may have about being a RI notary public. The RI Department of State also offers free notary training several times each month. Visit the training calendar and register for a date convenient for you.

1. How should my notary stamp look and where do I get one?

The stamp must be round or rectangular with an edge border surrounding the required elements of the stamp. The stamp must include the notary's name exactly as it appears on their commission, the words "Notary Public" and "Rhode Island." The stamp must also be self-inking or capable of being inked with a dark-color ink. You may purchase a stamp at an office supply retailer online or in-store.

2. Should I use a journal?

Rhode Island notaries are strongly encouraged to use a notary journal, but it is not required by law. Many notaries find that using a journal is a protective measure for themselves and a very beneficial tool when responding to a notary complaint or testifying to the details of a notarial act they performed.

3. What forms of identification can I accept?

- Driver's license or identification card issued by the RI Division of Motor Vehicles or by another state or territory of the U.S., Canada, or Mexico;
- Valid passport issued by the U.S. Department of State or by a foreign government; or
- Identification card issued by any branch of the U.S. armed forces.

All identification must be either current or expired not more than three years and must be the original document, not a copy.

4. How can a signer use a credible witness?

If a signer does not have an acceptable form of ID, they can choose to use a credible witness to prove their identity. A credible witness must be:

- Personally known to the signer;
- Identified by the notary by an acceptable form of identification;
- Physically in the notary's and signer's presence at the time of notarization;
- An unbiased third party who has no interest in, or benefit from, the transaction; and
- Placed under oath by the notary to swear that the signer's identity is valid.

5. How do I update/change my information?

Complete the Notary Information Update Form and submit it to the RI Department of State Notary Division. There is no fee to update your commission information. Notaries are required to report changes to their notary commission within 10 days of the change, except for updates to the notary's status as an electronic notary, which must be reported within 5 days of the change.

6. Can I still notarize a document if my commission expired?

Yes, a notary public may continue to use their commission for thirty (30) days after the date on which their commission expires. Once 30 days have passed, you may no longer use your commission until it is successfully renewed.

7. What do I do if I want to resign?

A notary may resign their commission at any time by notifying the RI Department of State, Notary Division in writing by email to notaries@sos.ri.gov or by mail to 148 W. River Street, Providence, RI 02904.

8. Can I notarize for a relative?

No, a notary public cannot perform a notarial act for a spouse, domestic partner, parent, guardian, child, or sibling, including in-law, step, or half relatives.

9. Can I charge a fee to notarize a document?

A RI notary public may charge a fee not to exceed \$25 per document/notarization.

10. If I am a notary for my employer and leave the job, am I still a notary?

Yes, a notary public owns their commission, stamp, and journal regardless of whether their employer paid for said commission and notary tools.

11. Can I notarize a document in another state using my RI notary commission?

No, RI notaries may not perform a notarial act anywhere outside of Rhode Island.

12. Can I refuse to notarize a document?

You should refuse to notarize a document if you cannot properly screen the signer for identity, willingness, and competency, if the document contains information you know is false or fraudulent, or if you are otherwise prohibited from performing a notarial act on the given document. You should not refuse to notarize a document simply because you “don’t want to” or are not sure how to perform your duties properly.

13. What is the difference between an oath and affirmation?

An oath is a spoken pledge to a God or a higher power. An affirmation is a spoken pledge made on the signer’s personal honor with no reference to a higher power. Either one can be used in an oath or affirmation notarial ceremony.

14. Can I notarize a document from another state?

A RI notary can notarize any type of document unless the document specifically says the document must be notarized by a notary commissioned in a different jurisdiction.

15. What is a notarial certificate, and do I have to use one?

A notarial certificate is legally required wording that is a part of or attached to the document that is being notarized and states the facts attested by the notary during a particular notarial act, including:

- The place where the notarial act took place;
- When the notarial act took place;
- Which notarial act was performed;
- Who appeared before the notary; and
- Details about the notary’s commission, including the required inked notary stamp.

RI notaries must use a notarial certificate each time they perform a notarial act. Sample Certificates are available for download and use at sos.ri.gov/divisions/notary-public/become-a-notary/notary-supplies.