

How process serving works

A plain-language guide to serving court documents in British Columbia, and what happens next

Reference and help guide only — not legal or procedural advice. See the notice on this page.

Please read this first. This guide explains, in everyday language, how court documents are served in British Columbia and what usually happens afterward. It is a reference and help guide only. It is **not legal advice and not procedural advice** for your case. We are process servers, not lawyers: we deliver documents and swear to what we did. What you should file, when, and what to do next in your matter are questions for a lawyer, or for the free B.C. services listed at the end. Court rules change; the links here go to the official, current versions.

1. What “service” means and why it matters

When you start a court case, or take certain steps inside one, the other person has a right to know. **Service** is the formal way of telling them: delivering the court documents so they have the chance to read them, get advice, and respond. A court will not go ahead against someone until it is satisfied they were properly told.

That is why service is about **proof** as much as delivery. Handing over an envelope is easy. What the court needs is a sworn record, from someone with no stake in the case, of exactly who received what, when, where, and how. That record is the **affidavit of service**, and producing it is most of what a process server is for.

Two kinds of service come up again and again:

- **Personal service** means the document is physically handed to the person named. It is required for the documents that start a case and for a few others, because the court wants to be sure the person actually received them.
- **Ordinary service** covers most later documents in a case, once the person has given an address for service. These can usually be mailed, emailed, faxed, or dropped at that address, following the rules for each court.

Which documents need which kind is set by the rules of the court your matter is in. The main ones in B.C. are:

Court	Rules	Where service is covered
Supreme Court of B.C. — civil cases	Supreme Court Civil Rules	Part 4. Rule 4-3 personal service; Rule 4-4 alternative methods; Rule 4-6 proving service (Form 15 and Form 16 affidavits).
Supreme Court of B.C. — family cases	Supreme Court Family Rules	Part 6. Rule 6-3 personal service; Rule 6-4 alternative methods; Rule 6-6 proving service.
Provincial Court — small claims (up to \$35,000)	Small Claims Rules	Rule 2 serving a notice of claim; Rule 18(9) when another method of service is permitted. The government's Serving documents guide walks through it.
Provincial Court — family cases	Provincial Court Family Rules	Rule 176 ordinary service; Rule 177 personal service; Rule 182 alternative methods; Rule 183 proving service (Form 7 Certificate of Service).

Official court forms for every court are collected on the [B.C. court forms page](#).

2. What happens when you hire us

1 You send us the documents

Email the documents to be served, with the name of the person, the address (and any other address you know of), any deadline or court date, and anything that helps us find them. If the court requires the original to be served, we arrange to collect it. We confirm receipt the same day.

2 We go and find them

A server attends the address. We vary the days and times, speak to neighbours or building staff where appropriate, and leave a card asking the person to contact us. Every attempt is recorded on the spot with the time, a GPS location stamp, notes on who answered, and photos where useful. We keep you updated as the job progresses.

3 We serve the documents

For personal service, the server identifies the person and hands them the documents. They do not have to sign anything, and they do not have to agree to anything. If they refuse to take the papers, the rules allow the server to leave them nearby after telling the person what they are; that still counts. A company is served through its registered office or a person in charge there, as the rules set out.

4 We swear the affidavit of service

The server prepares a sworn statement in the form the court requires: who was served, with which documents, on what date, at what time and place, and how the person was identified. It is sworn or affirmed before a commissioner for taking affidavits or a notary. We send it to you as a PDF, and the original is available if your court needs it.

For Supreme Court civil matters this is Form 15 (personal service) or Form 16 (ordinary service). For Provincial Court family matters it is the Form 7 Certificate of Service. Small claims and Supreme Court family matters have their own forms; see the links in section 1.

5 You file the affidavit, and the case moves on

The affidavit goes into the court file, with the other documents in your case. Filing is done at the court registry or, for many matters, through [Court Services Online](#), the province's electronic court registry. We can file at the Kelowna courthouse for you on request.

Once the court has proof of service, the other person's time to respond is running. If they respond, the case proceeds with both sides. If they do not respond in time, you may be able to ask the court to proceed without them, for example by applying for default judgment. Those steps, and their deadlines, are set by the rules and are where legal advice matters most.

Typical time to respond after service (as the rules read in September 2026; confirm the current rule for your court before relying on it):

- Supreme Court civil claim served in Canada: 21 days to file a response.
- Supreme Court family claim served in Canada: 30 days.
- Small claims notice of claim served in B.C.: 14 days to file a reply.
- Provincial Court family application: usually 30 days.

3. When the person cannot be found, or is avoiding service

Some people are simply hard to reach: they work shifts, travel, or have moved. Some know documents are coming and avoid the door. Either way, the case does not stall for good. The rules anticipate this, and the path forward runs through a second kind of affidavit.

What we do first

Before anyone goes to court about it, we make a genuine effort. That usually means several attempts at different times of day and on different days, including evenings and weekends; checking any other address you have given us, including a workplace; speaking to whoever answers, neighbours, landlords, or building managers; and leaving our card asking the person to call. A surprising number of people do call, once they understand that receiving the documents commits them to nothing and that avoiding them does not stop the case.

The affidavit of attempted service

If service still has not happened, we prepare an **affidavit of attempted service**. This is a sworn, detailed account of every attempt: the date, time, and address of each visit; what the server saw and who they spoke to; what was said; the card left; the other addresses checked; and anything suggesting the person lives there or is deliberately not answering. GPS stamps and photos back it up. Its purpose is to show the court that personal service has been tried properly and is not working.

What you do with it: asking for another method of service

With that affidavit, you (or your lawyer) can apply to the court for an order allowing service **by another method**. This is sometimes called **substituted** or **alternative service**. The court can allow, for example:

- mailing or couriering the documents to the address;
- leaving them with an adult at the residence, or posting them on the door;
- emailing them, or sending them through social media or a messaging app the person is known to use;
- serving them on a relative, employer, or lawyer who is in touch with the person;
- publishing a notice in a newspaper, as a last resort.

The rules that allow this are Rule 4-4 of the [Supreme Court Civil Rules](#), Rule 6-4 of the [Supreme Court Family Rules](#), Rule 18(9) of the [Small Claims Rules](#), and Rule 182 of the [Provincial Court Family Rules](#). Each court has its own way of making the application and its own forms; the [court forms page](#) and the small claims [how-to guides](#) are the official starting points.

Once the order is made, we carry it out exactly as written, whether that is a posting on the door, a mailing, or an email, and we swear a further **affidavit of service** showing that the order was followed step by step. From there the case proceeds as if the person had been served in person: their time to respond runs, and the court can make decisions in their absence if they stay silent.

If the person truly cannot be located

When there is no working address at all, the same application is the route, supported by an affidavit describing the searches made. The court decides what method is reasonable in the circumstances; in some situations it can allow service in a way that does not depend on knowing where the person is, such as publication or service through someone in contact with them. What the court will accept depends on the case and is a question for your lawyer or the resources below.

4. What we do, and what we leave to you

We do	We don't
Serve documents personally, or by whatever method the court has ordered, anywhere in the Okanagan and B.C. Interior.	Give legal advice, or tell you what to file, when, or whether your case is a good one.
Record every attempt with time, GPS, notes, and photos, and keep you updated as the job progresses.	Decide deadlines for you. The time to respond is set by the rules and the date of service; confirm it yourself or with a lawyer.
Prepare and swear the affidavit of service, or of attempted service, in the form your court requires.	Apply to court for an order for alternative service. We supply the affidavit; the application is yours or your lawyer's to make.
File at the Kelowna courthouse on request, and return commissioned originals.	Guarantee that any particular person can be found. We report honestly on what we found, and stop when you tell us to.

5. Words you will see

Affidavit	A written statement of facts that the person making it swears or affirms is true, in front of a commissioner or notary. Lying in one is an offence.
Affidavit of service	The affidavit that proves a document was served: who, what, when, where, how.
Affidavit of attempted service	The affidavit that records each unsuccessful attempt, used to support an application for another method of service.
Alternative / substituted service	Service by a method the court has ordered because personal service is not practical. Sometimes shortened to “substitutional service”.
Commissioner for taking affidavits	A person authorised to witness the swearing of an affidavit: lawyers, notaries, and certain court and government staff.
Default judgment	A judgment given because the other side did not respond in time. Whether and how it is available depends on the court and the case.
Deponent	The person who swears an affidavit. For an affidavit of service, that is our server.
Exhibit	A document attached to an affidavit and referred to in it, such as a copy of what was served.
Personal service	Physically handing the document to the person named (or to the right person at a company).
Registry	The court office where documents are filed and the court file is kept. Each courthouse has one.
Style of cause	The heading on a court document naming the parties and the court file number.

6. Official references and free B.C. help

The rules and forms (Government of British Columbia)

- [Supreme Court Civil Rules](https://bclaws.gov.bc.ca/) — bclaws.gov.bc.ca, the official current text.
- [Supreme Court Family Rules](https://bclaws.gov.bc.ca/) — bclaws.gov.bc.ca.
- [Small Claims Rules](https://bclaws.gov.bc.ca/) — bclaws.gov.bc.ca.
- [Provincial Court Family Rules](https://bclaws.gov.bc.ca/) — bclaws.gov.bc.ca.
- [Court forms](#) — all B.C. court forms by court, including [Supreme Court civil forms](#) (Forms 15 and 16).
- [Small claims](#) — the government's overview, with [how-to guides](#) including [Serving documents](#) and Getting results.
- [Family justice](#) — the government's general information on family law in B.C.
- [Court Services Online](#) — search court files and e-file documents.

The courts

- bccourts.ca — Supreme Court of B.C. and Court of Appeal.
- provinciacourt.bc.ca — Provincial Court of B.C. (small claims, family, criminal).

Free, B.C.-specific help

- [Legal Aid BC](#) and its [Family Law in BC](#) site — plain-language guides and, for those who qualify, a lawyer.
- [Clicklaw](#) — a directory of B.C. legal information and services.
- [People's Law School](#) — free, plain-language legal information for British Columbians.
- [Access Pro Bono](#) — free legal advice clinics.

Questions about your file? Call or text 250-718-8441, or email OkanaganProcessServers@gmail.com. We will tell you exactly what we did, when, and what your affidavit says. For what to do next in your case, please speak to a lawyer or one of the free services above.