



THE FLORIDA START-UP CHECKLIST:

Plan for the future by preparing now

Whether you are in the “thinking about it” stage or are ready for launch, give your new business the best chance of success by making sure you have these elements in place before you open your doors. And take full advantage of the free resources available to you from the [US Small Business Administration](#).

BUSINESS FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT: This exercise helps you create and define the road map for your business: What business are you in? What problem are you trying to solve? Who and where are your customers? How will you reach them? How much will it cost you to operate? How will you make and manage the money flowing in and out? Who are your key suppliers and partners? There are several easy-to-use tools, like the [Business Model Canvas](#), to help you visually organize your thoughts around your core mission (aka Value Proposition), customer identification (aka your target markets), your business operations and the potential for profitability. Free business resources like the Florida [Veterans Business Outreach Center \(VBOC\)](#), the [Florida Small Business Development Center \(SBDC\) network](#) and no-cost business mentors at [SCORE.org](#) can help you develop your road map to success before you invest your time and money into it.

ASSEMBLE YOUR B.A.I.L TEAM: Every entrepreneur needs a “B.A.I.L Team”: a Banker, an Accountant, an Insurance Agent and a Lawyer on their side. Each team member plays an important role in helping you succeed in business.

BUSINESS NAME: Step #1 before you do anything official is to create a list of the names you would like to use for your business, then go online and search for them. How many other businesses share that name? Are there others in your same operating area? The goal is to make it easy for your customers to identify your business and avoid confusion with others.

You are also looking out for registered trademarks associated with that name. If your online search reveals an ® after the name, that business or product name is not an option. Check your next choice.

REGISTERING YOUR BUSINESS IN FLORIDA: Do an “official” name search on [SUNBIZ.org](#), the Florida Department of State Division of Corporations’ website for registering your business with the State. This is the site where you create a Florida-based LLC, register corporations doing business in Florida, and/or register a Fictitious Name (DBA = doing business as) for sole proprietors or partnerships. Warning: Your LLC cannot have the same name as another active business in Florida.

More about LLC (Limited Liability Company): In Florida, you must register a new LLC on SUNBIZ and pay the initial filing fee. Certificates are optional. You will receive an email with your LLC number. Retain this in a safe place because you will need this number often in business. You can always look it up on [SunBiz](#) since it will be on public record there. You must renew your LLC’s status every year and pay the annual renewal fee before 1 May to keep your LLC “Active”. If you do not renew/pay on time, your LLC is deemed “Inactive”. There is a hefty late fee to reactivate it. This does not mean you closed up shop.

This is simply a failure to pay up annually on time. *Beware of using the name of an “inactive LLC” to preclude confusion with possible creditors or other adverse legal action.*

What about DBA or Fictitious Names? If you are not using your own name, you will be using a Fictitious Name or DBA. For example, *John Doe doing business as DBA JD Plumbing*. Your first stop should be SUNBIZ.org too. You must file a [Fictitious Name Registration application online](#) or pick up an application at your city or county tax collector’s office. You will pay an initial filing fee (\$50 for a 5-year period) and run a Legal Notice one time in a newspaper in the city where your business is located. No additional fictitious name action is required for corporations or LLCs in Florida.

To protect your company name, you may consider trademarking it. You can use the ™ after your business and product names. There is no legal protection for a simple trademark. As mentioned above, before you name the business or products, your online research should have identified if others have officially paid to register their names and are using ®. Proof of status begins with a search online with the [US Patent & Trademark Office’s TESS](#) site. The search is free, but application is not. The USPTO has a [good video](#) on this subject. Legal counsel is advised.

BUSINESS DOMAIN NAME: Almost every business today needs a domain name (URL) for your website. Choosing a domain name is as much art as science. Make it easy for your customers to remember and use. Your exact business name may not be available, so experiment with different names or try a catch phrase (*ex. Roberts Pest Control might use NoMoreBugs.com*). Website naming and hosting fees vary widely and must be renewed periodically. Read this contract carefully. If you simply want a business email (*name/title/info@yourcompany.com*), consider a subscription to services like [Google Apps for Work](#)

LEGAL FORM OF BUSINESS: Carefully consider this decision and consult with a tax professional to understand what structure works best for you – *your B.A.I.L team should include an accounting or tax professional*. Operating as a sole proprietorship (including DBA), a partnership, Limited Liability Company (LLC), an S or a C corporation has specific ownership, liability and tax ramifications. Depending on the structure you select, you will register your business entity with the [Florida Department of State’s Division of Corporations](#).

Learn more about the various legal structures at <https://www.sba.gov/business-guide/launch-your-business/choose-business-structure>

STARTUP FINANCING: Most startup entrepreneurs finance their businesses using their personal savings or money from family and friends. Check your personal credit report before you approach a lender to correct errors. This service is FREE once a year from each of the three credit reporting agencies (Equifax, Experian and TransUnion) through AnnualCreditReport.com. Remember, lenders are looking for the “The Five Cs: your personal Credit, your Collateral, your Commitment to the venture, your Character, and the company’s potential or current Cash flow”. *Make sure your personal financial house is in order before you take on debt or risk your retirement in a business venture.*

Learn more about the business funding at <https://www.sba.gov/funding-programs>

TAX ID NUMBER / FEDERAL EMPLOYER IDENTIFICATION NUMBER (FEIN): Every business entity should have its own unique tax ID number. Even if you are a sole proprietor doing business in your own name, do not use your personal Social Security number – *protect your personal identity carefully!* Apply for your business tax identification number online at [IRS.gov](https://irs.gov). You will need an FEIN to open a business checking account and pay your taxes.

BUSINESS BANK ACCOUNT: Your banker is another important member of your B.A.I.L team. You'll need a business bank account in the name of your business to receive and make payments, pay taxes, etc. At the very least, use a separate account for business expenses: *we highly recommended keeping your business and personal accounts separate*. If your business involves E-commerce, mobile payments or smart register systems, pick a bank that supports those services. Some credit unions also offer business accounts.

Before you open a business account, apply for a tax identification number for your business (see above). Next, decide who should be authorized to sign checks or conduct banking business for your company. Just you? A spouse? Business partners or key employees? Identification for each signer will be required. Ask for a debit card to use to purchase supplies for the business. *Do not mingle personal and business expenses!*

Learn more about business banking basics at <https://www.sba.gov/business-guide/launch-your-business/open-business-bank-account>

STATE AND BUSINESS LICENSES AND PERMITS: Florida licensing requirements are dictated by industry. Check with the [Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation](https://www.floridarevenue.com/Pages/info_business.aspx) (*also see the Services for Military Personnel section*), the [Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services](https://www.floridarevenue.com/Pages/info_business.aspx) or the [Florida Department of Health](https://www.floridarevenue.com/Pages/info_business.aspx). In addition to state licensing requirements, check with your local Tax Collector's Office about any general business or industry- specific licenses required by your city or county.

SALES TAX COLLECTION: Sales taxes must be collected on a wide range of goods purchased online or in store in Florida. Increasingly, out of state/online sales transactions might also incur sale tax collection for the purchaser's state. Ignorance is no excuse when it comes to sales tax collection. Check with your county's local Dept of Revenue office and learn more about business sales taxes at https://floridarevenue.com/Pages/info_business.aspx

BUSINESS PHONE: Every business needs a phone number. Cable services that offer internet for your business can also provide phone service for your store or home-based business. If you and your business are mobile, you can now add a toll-free or another local number without buying another cell phone. Check your wireless provider for that service.

Either way, think of your phone number as a marketing tool. Make it easy for your customers to remember with a numerical acronym, like 800-GO-FEDEX (463-3339). It may not cost anything extra if the number is available in your area. And change your voice message to reflect your company name.

BUSINESS INSURANCE: Your Business Insurance Agent is an important part of your B.A.I.L team who can offer insurance for your equipment, inventory, physical location and business vehicles. Look for profession-specific liability insurance through an industry trade association or an agent versed in commercial liability. If you don't know a commercial insurance agent, ask others in your line of work for a referral. Learn more about the business insurance at <https://www.sba.gov/business-guide/launch-your-business/get-business-insurance>

If you have employees, Florida may also require you to carry workers' compensation insurance. Check with the [Florida Division of Workers' Compensation](#).

BUSINESS LOCATION: Depending on your industry, you may choose to run your business from home. Check with your city or county as well as your neighborhood association (HOA) about compliance and zoning restrictions before you start making financial commitments. Take your customers into consideration too. Will they be comfortable coming to your home for services? If your business needs more space, consider renting a secure, preferably climate-controlled storage unit for supplies, inventory and equipment. You can also rent a mail box at the US Post Office or UPS Store. Note: You cannot use a PO Box or UPS store address for your physical business, only your mailing address.

If you need a retail or commercial office, put yourself in the customer's shoes. Is the location visible, appealing and accessible? What about parking, lighting, security and exterior signage? Are the surrounding businesses compatible with yours? A good way to attract new customers is to locate near other businesses that your potential customer might also patronize, like a gift shop near a beauty salon or a coffee shop near schools, doctors' offices, major retailers, etc.

Before you sign a lease or contract, consult with a business attorney (your B.A.I.L team member) to understand the terms and conditions. Your legal expert can help you avoid costly mistakes. If you don't know a business attorney, ask other people in your field of work for recommendations. You as the owner may be required to personally guarantee lease payments even though it is for your business.

EQUIPMENT: Business equipment generally includes computers and software, printers, furniture and fixtures, phones, any specialized equipment for your industry, and perhaps vehicles. Before you pay top dollar for new equipment, bootstrap by buying used or refurbished equipment. *Your customer will not care if your copier is refurbished!* Leasing may be an affordable option to outright purchases. As with any contract, understand the terms of the agreement before you sign on the dotted line.

MARKETING MATERIALS: Basics include a website and social media in addition to site signage, business cards, brochures, price sheets, menus or other print materials. Apparel with your company name is very affordable and solves that "what employees wear to work" issue. Make your vehicle a mobile billboard with magnetic signs or decals, if appropriate. Physical locations that require signage may face local restrictions. Check with your local business licensing office for requirements.

YOUR BUSINESS ONLINE: We have already addressed website domain choices. Also consider what services you want to provide your customers online like buying products or scheduling services, have a chat bot - and look for platforms that fit your needs. Many platforms are fairly easy to create and manage. Social media is an important component too. Use tools like LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter to advertise your business, and consider hiring someone to manage and monitor your online presence on a regular basis.

EMPLOYEES: If you need employees to get your business off the ground, make time to hire and train them before you open. If you can't afford or don't need full-time employees, you can hire seasonal or part-time help or use independent contractors for special assignments or during your busy season.

Finding good employees is always a challenge. [CareerSource Centers](#) are Florida's statewide no-cost "employment agency", connecting potential employees to businesses across the state. CareerSource services are customized to your business needs and best of all, are free. [Employee leasing companies](#) are also an option for short-term or even long-term staffing needs. There may also be economic tax credits or incentives to hire targeted groups, like disadvantaged youth, displaced workers from shuttered businesses, returning felons, etc.

If hiring a military veteran or military spouse interests you, each CareerSource office will have a veteran employment specialist onboard. Veteran-specific websites like [Hire Our Heroes](#) and [Veterans Florida](#) help you post jobs and recruit qualified veterans for your company at no charge.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF NO-COST BUSINESS COUNSELING SERVICES FROM US SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (SBA) RESOURCES: SBA offers no-cost business counseling and resources through its Resource Partners: the Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) specifically for military and their spouses to start and grow a business, mentors through SCORE.org, and more localized assistance through Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) all across the state, and the regional Women's Business Centers (WBC) which focus on women starting and growing a business. Find the SBA resources near you at <https://www.sba.gov/local-assistance>



This document was created by the staff of the Florida Veterans Business Outreach Center as a roadmap to actual start-up. It can also be found on our BASIC TRAINING page (<https://vboc.org/basic-training>) under the [START-UP](#) section.

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Reference Credit:

