



CITY OF IRVINE

CALIFORNIA



How to Start a Business Guide

The Development Assistance Center (DAC) has all the resources you need to get started!

Note: This should be used as a general tool to help you broadly assess how to start a business in Irvine, not as a direct step-by-step guideline.

Dream Big

Successful businesses begin with a plan, and the best plans are clear, actionable, and adaptable as operating conditions evolve. A simple way to begin your plan is with these fundamental questions:

- Who is your customer?
- What will your customer value (and pay for)?
- Who are your competitors and how do they serve the market?
- How will you differentiate your business from your competitors?
- What skills and experience do you bring to your business, and what skills/experience gaps do you need to fill?
- How will you fund/finance your business?

From there, you can delve into specifics of:

- The business itself (i.e., product, location, staffing needs, resource requirements, and budgeting).
- Legal entity structure best suited for your business (i.e., sole proprietor, partnership, limited liability company, C corporation, 501(c)(3) nonprofit, etc.).
- Requirements (i.e., business license, permits, regulatory requirements, etc.).

Do you need help making plans? Check out these resources:

- California Office of the Small Business Advocate (CalOSBA)
 - CalOSBA helps California small business-owners find and navigate resources, programs, and regulations so they can start, manage, grow, become more resilient, and thrive.
 - Helpful Links:
 - [**Business Learning Center**](#)
 - [**Business Quick Start Guides**](#)
 - [**Setting Up Your Business in California**](#)

- Orange County Inland Empire Small Business Development Center Network ([OCIE SBDC](#))
 - OCIE SBDC delivers individualized business advising and technical assistance to existing small businesses and pre-venture entrepreneurs.
 - Helpful Links:
 - [**Get Matched with a Consultant**](#)
 - [**Free Training Programs**](#)
- [**SCORE**](#)
 - SCORE’s mission is to foster vibrant small business communities through mentoring and education.
 - Helpful Links:
 - Take [**Comprehensive Learning Courses**](#)
 - Attend [**Business Workshops and Webinars**](#)
 - [**Find a Mentor**](#)
- U.S. Small Business Administration ([SBA](#))
 - The U.S. SBA provides counseling, capital, and contracting expertise to help small business owners and entrepreneurs.
 - Helpful Links:
 - Get Free [**Business Counseling**](#)
 - Explore Courses in the [**Learning Center**](#)
- [**Chambers of Commerce**](#) in Orange County (Note: Membership Required)
 - Chambers exist to advance economic activity in the business community. Chambers are great for connecting with resources to grow your business, networking with other businesspeople, and advocating on business issues.

Pick a Site

Three tests must be passed in order for a business to operate at a particular site:

1. Zoning: The business or “use” must be in a location (zoning district) for which it is properly zoned.
 - [**Look Up Zoning Based on Address**](#)
 - View Citywide [**Zoning Map**](#)
 - View the City’s [**Zoning Ordinance and Use List by Zoning District**](#)

2. Land Use Entitlement: The business or “use” must generate the right amount of traffic.
 - Every business in Irvine is assigned a specific “entitlement value” or “trip rate” that limits the amount of traffic a business can generate.
3. Parking: The site must have sufficient parking based on the type of business (per the City’s Parking Standards).
 - View the City’s [**Automobile Parking Matrix**](#) (IMC §4-3-4).

If you have identified a potential site, contact the DAC Planning Team to verify if the use is possible.

Resources:

- Visit the City’s [**Zoning**](#) website for additional information.
- [**Schedule a meeting**](#) with the Development Assistance Center (DAC) Planning Team.
- Call 949-724-6308 or email [**planning@cityofirvine.org**](mailto:planning@cityofirvine.org) for assistance.

Choose a Business Structure

The business structure you choose influences everything from day-to-day operations, to taxes and how much of your personal assets are at risk. You should choose a business structure that gives you the right balance of legal protections and benefits.

Refer to the SBA’s [**Choose a Business Structure**](#) website to learn about and compare common business structures.

Choose a Business Name and, if Applicable, File a Fictitious Business Name

An individual or a business entity must file a fictitious business name (FBN) statement with the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk’s office in the county where the business will be located when the name of the business does not include the owner’s last name.

Refer to CalOSBA’s [**Choose a Business Name**](#) guidance for additional details.

File a FBN statement with the Orange County Clerk-Recorder [**here**](#).

Get a Business License

The City of Irvine requires all commercial and residential businesses operating within the City to obtain and maintain an active Irvine business license.

Cost:

- As of August 15, 2023, there is a \$95.59 fee to obtain a business license for companies with five (5) or more employees. The fee for companies with four (4) employees or less is \$68.57.
- An annual renewal fee of \$68.57 will be applied to all businesses.
- The State of California requires an additional \$4 fee for all applications and renewals.

Apply for a new business license [here](#).

Every business operating from residential premises within the City is required to obtain a Home Occupation Permit in addition to obtaining and maintaining an active business license. If applicable, [apply here](#).

Renew, update, or print a copy of your business license [here](#).

Resources:

- Learn more about business licenses [here](#).
- ***Schedule a meeting*** with the Development Assistance Center (DAC) Business Licensing Team.
- Call 949-724-7128 or email businesslicense@cityofirvine.org for assistance.

If Applicable, Get State Permits and Licenses

Visit the [State's Guide to Permits, Licensing, and Regulations](#) to learn more about permitting agencies, environmental permits, and professional licenses.

Use CalGold's [Permit Assistance Tool](#) to find the appropriate permit information for your business and locate contact information for the various agencies that administer and issues these permits.

If Applicable, Register with the Secretary of State

If your business is a limited liability company, corporation, partnership, or nonprofit corporation, you'll probably need to register with any state where you conduct business activities.

- Typically, you're considered to be conducting business activities in a state when:
 - Your business has a physical presence in the state
 - You often have in-person meetings with clients in the state
 - A significant portion of your company's revenue comes from the state
 - Any of your employees work in the state

Learn more about which business entities need to register with the California Secretary of State [here](#).

Register your business with the California Secretary of State [here](#).

If Applicable, Get a Federal Employee Identification Number

Applying for an Employer Identification Number (EIN) is a free service offered by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

Refer to the [IRS website](#) for information about which businesses need an EIN.

Learn about applying for an EIN [here](#).

If Applicable, Get a State Employer Payroll Tax Account Number

If you operate a business and employ one or more employees, you must register as an employer and set up an Employment Development Department payroll tax account through the State.

Learn more about payroll tax accounts and register your business [here](#).

Open a Business Bank Account

Open a business account when you are ready to start accepting or spending money as your business. A business bank account helps you stay legally compliant and protected. It also provides benefits to your customers and employees.

Learn more about the benefits of business bank accounts through the [SBA](#).

Identify and Secure Business Financing

Determine the best approach and options to finance your business.

The SBDC [Access to Capital](#) page offers guidance on financing for all phases of business growth. SCORE, SBA, banks, and some credit unions are all potential sources of business financing.

Get Business Insurance

Commercial insurance can protect you from some of the most common losses experienced by business owners, such as property damage, business interruption, theft, liability, and worker injury.

Learn more about commercial insurance through the [California Department of Insurance](#).

Identify Partners

Consider the highest, best allocation of your time as you start and grow your business — that may be in research and development, product design, networking with peers, or prospective customers.

Many early-stage businesses benefit from working with outside firms to handle activities like bookkeeping, accounting, payroll management, human resources, website management and maintenance, marketing, and/or IT. [Chambers of Commerce](#) can be a resource in identifying providers to meet these needs.