

Making Sense of Small Business Licensing Handout

Thank you for attending MZA Legal and Philadelphia VIP's workshop on business licensing in Philadelphia. We hope the presentation gave you some clarity. Please use the following handout as a further resource to help you identify your business licensing requirements and resources to help you meet them.

What do I need to secure the proper licenses for my business? It depends. The city issues hundreds of different licenses, permits and certificates. Each covers a different type of activity, and each application has its own requirements. However, there are a few things that you'll need to fulfill the requirements of most license and permit applications:

An **Employer Identification Number (EIN)**: An EIN is like a social security number for your business. It is used to identify your business for official purposes. Every business needs an EIN, except for sole proprietors with no employees. If you work with a professional to form your business, they should get your EIN and provide it to you. If you are forming the business on your own, you can get an EIN for free online at <https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/apply-for-an-employer-identification-number-ein-online>.

A **Philadelphia tax account number**: Everyone doing business in Philadelphia is required to have a Philadelphia tax account. You may check your tax account number or register for a new one at <https://tax-services.phila.gov/>.

A **Commercial Activity License**: Everyone doing business in Philadelphia is required to have a Commercial Activity License. The license is free and relatively simple to get. Learn more at <https://www.phila.gov/services/permits-violations-licenses/get-a-license/business-licenses/activity/get-a-commercial-activity-license/>.

Contact information business owner(s) or license applicants.

If you are applying for a trade related license, you will need a **certificate of insurance**. Policies can often be obtained relatively quickly. Make sure your policy meets the standards required to obtain the proper license, permit, or certificate.

For permits related to the use of or changes to a building, **plans** need to be presented for review. Plans should be prepared by a professional. If you recently moved into the building, you may need to present a **copy of the deed** (if you own) **or your lease** (if you rent).

Make sure there are no **zoning issues** preventing you from applying for your license. This is most important for new businesses with a physical location. If your property was formerly used for another purpose, you may need a zoning permit before opening your new business.



How do I find out what licenses I need to do business? A good place to start is the city's Business Services Website (<https://business.phila.gov/>). If you click the "Launch" box, you can explore licensing requirements based on business type. You can also click the "Find A License or Permit" button near the top right corner to search for licenses that apply to your business. Pennsylvania also has an online tool that business owners can use to create a business registration checklist. That tool can be found here - <https://business.pa.gov/register/>.

Remember, you don't have to figure this out on your own and you don't have to spend an arm and a leg to get help. Some of the free resources of information include:

Other professionals in your industry may be the best resource to turn to. Because they've been through the process themselves, they may be able to provide helpful tips or warnings about your licensing requirements so you can avoid unnecessary delays.

Local **Community Development Corporations (CDCs)** may offer guidance on business licensing to local entrepreneurs and business owners. [This website](#) has a map and contact information that you can use to find and contact your local CDC.

The **Office of Business Services** provides information to new business owners looking to get properly licensed. You can contact them through the form on their website (<https://business.phila.gov/contact/>), or by giving them a call at 215-683-2100.

Your **local elected official's office** is another resource new entrepreneurs may turn to. Office staff may be able to provide useful information and guidance on business licensing requirements.

Other resources that may be helpful include: [SCORE Philadelphia](#) and [The Business Resource and Innovation Center](#).

If you need help applying for a particular license or permit, the Permit and License Center offers virtual appointments to assist you with applications over Zoom. You can schedule an appointment by phone (dial 311 in Philadelphia or 215-686-8686 outside the city) or online at <https://kiosk.us2.qless.com/kiosk/app/home/7100000030>.

