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Step-by-Step Guide to Obtaining a Business License

Practical and detailed guide: how to apply for a business license in the U.S. — step by step.

Explained simply

Key idea:

There is no single “*business license*” at the federal level; what you need depends on the activity you will perform (*food sales, barbershop, alcohol sales, import/export, etc.*) and where you will operate (*city/county/state*).

That's why you must review the 3 levels:

federal > state > local (city/county).



Step 0 — Before you start (*very important*)

- Decide exactly what you will sell or do (for example: “prepared food sales,” “auto repair shop,” “online consulting,” “online store with physical warehouse,” etc.).
- Decide the exact address where you will operate (physical location or if you will work from home). The location defines many rules (zoning, health permits, local taxes).



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Step 1 – Register the basics of your business (if you haven't yet)

1. **Choose a legal structure:** sole proprietor, LLC, partnership, corporation (Inc.), etc. This affects taxes, liability, and what registrations you need.
2. **Register the business name:** if applicable (DBA / "Doing Business As" or LLC/corporation registration with your state's Secretary of State).

Why now? Many local offices require state documents (e.g., LLC certificate) to issue the local business license.

Step 2 – Obtain the tax IDs usually required

- **EIN (Employer Identification Number):** most businesses need it for taxes, bank accounts, and certain permits. You can request it online from the IRS (if eligible) and receive it instantly.
- In some states, you also need a state tax ID (sales tax permit / seller's permit). Check your state's Department of Revenue.





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Step 3 – Identify exactly which licenses/permits you need

Review the three levels:

A. Federal – only for activities regulated by federal agencies (e.g., import/export, transportation, fishing, firearms sales, agricultural products, alcohol, environmental activities). If your activity falls here, contact the corresponding federal agency.

B. State – professional licenses (nursing, cosmetology, contractors), sales tax permits, state health permits, and business registrations. Each state has its own rules.

C. Local (city/county) – you will almost always need a municipal license/permit to operate (business license), zoning permits, health inspection (if selling food), sign permits, building permits, etc. Many cities require the license before opening.



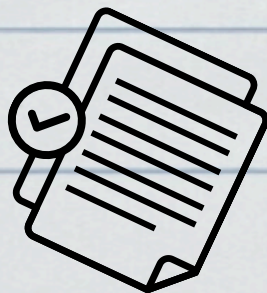


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Step 4 – How to quickly and safely find out what you need

1. Search your city's name + "business license" (e.g., "Miami business license" or in Spanish "Licencia comercial Ciudad de Miami"). The official city/municipal website usually has a "Business" or "Licenses & Permits" section. Government pages almost always end in .gov.
2. If you don't know how to use the website: **call City Hall / County Clerk and ask:** "I would like to apply for a business license for [type of business]. Which office should I go to and what documents do I need to bring?" Write down the person's name and phone number.
3. Use free assistance resources: **SBA (federal guide)** and local Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), which provide step-by-step guidance. You can search by ZIP code on the SBA website.





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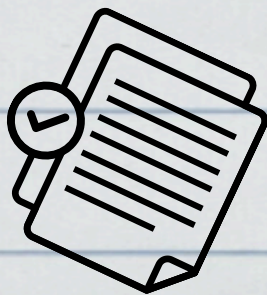


Step 5 – Prepare all common documents (checklist)

Always bring printed copies and extras:

- Identification document (passport or driver's license).
- Social Security Number (SSN) or ITIN (if applicable).
- Business registration documents (Articles of Organization, Certificate of Formation, DBA).
- EIN (if you already obtained it).
- Lease agreement or proof of ownership of the business address.
- Floor plans or photos of the location (if inspections are required).
- Proof of business insurance (if you already have it).
- Payment in the accepted form (check, money order, cards, or cash – verify with the office).
- Any municipal forms required (sometimes you can request them and bring them already filled out).

(Not all offices require everything listed above, but it's better to bring it all so you don't have to return.)



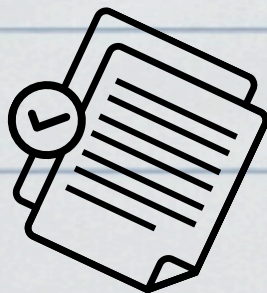


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Step 6 – How to complete and submit the application (step by step)

1. Download or request the form on the city/county website or go in person to the licensing office.
2. Fill out the form: if you don't understand something, ask for help at the office; staff usually guide you through the basic fields.
3. Pay the fee: most licenses charge an application or annual fee; the amount varies by city and business type. Keep the receipt.
4. Request inspections if required (health, fire department, building). Schedule inspections and accompany the inspector if needed.
5. Wait for approval: some cities issue the license the same day; others take days or weeks (depending on pending inspections).





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Step 7 – Inspections, compliance, and renewals

- **Inspections:** food businesses require health inspections; locations with machinery may require fire or building inspections. Complete any corrections requested.
- **Renewal:** many licenses renew annually or periodically; note the expiration date and set reminders.
- **Fines:** operating without a license or outside authorized conditions can result in fines or closure. Keep a file with the license and receipts.

Step 8 – Related procedures that are almost always recommended

- **Open a business bank account** (usually requires EIN and business registration).
- **Obtain business insurance** (liability, property) depending on your industry.
- **If you will sell products: register for sales tax** (seller's permit in your state).





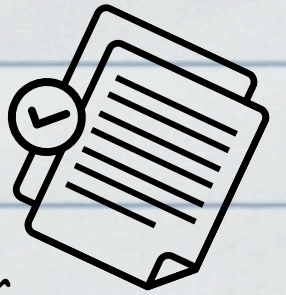
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Step 9 – Where to get free help

- **Small Business Development Centers (SBDC):** free guidance and local steps. Search for your area's SBDC by ZIP code.
- **SBA local assistance:** find offices, SCORE mentors, Women's Business Centers. Small Business Administration.
- **Local Chamber of Commerce:** often provides guides and practical orientation.

If you don't want to use a computer, go in person to the municipal licensing office or the public library – they often help you print or fill out basic forms.



If you prefer to avoid errors when completing your documents or don't have time, there are specialized companies that can assist you throughout the process, ensuring accuracy and compliance. Keep in mind these pages are NOT the government and have no connection with it.

- Business Filing US (<https://businessfilingus.com/>)
- Licencias de Negocios USA (<https://licenciasdenegociosusa.com/>)