



Steps to Starting a Business Guide

Want to be an entrepreneur?
Use this guide to learn more about how to start a business.

Step 1: Learn to Run a Business

There are various programs that can help you create a successful business, some aimed at those who were formerly incarcerated. These valuable programs offer many tools such as education and training or financial resources.

Resources for Justice-involved Individuals

- Inmates to Entrepreneurs hosts a free 8-week online course and a self-paced online course to teach previously incarcerated individuals how to plan, launch, and execute their business idea.
- Start Small Think Big works to pair individuals with free marketing, legal, and financial assistance to help achieve their business goals.
- Defy Ventures offers a 14-week entrepreneurship bootcamp available both online and in-person.

Additional programs are available where your criminal record will not affect your eligibility.

- Rising Tide Capital offers a 12-week business academy to teach business
 planning and management. The course is free, although you may be asked to
 pay a small fee for supplies. They also have financial assistance programs to
 help get your business up and running.
- Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) offer individualized mentorship and counseling to help you plan, launch, and grow your small business at little- to no-cost.

Step 2: Create a Business Plan

Goods or Services

The first step is to decide what type of business you want to start. Being an entrepreneur does not mean you have to invent the next million-dollar idea. Simple business ideas can be very profitable.

Businesses fall into one of two categories or sectors—products or services. Decide whether you want to sell a physical good or provide a service.

- Providing a service can be anything from landscape, car washing or meal prepping to electrical, plumbing, or HVAC.
- Products can be handmade or purchased specifically for resale

Skills + Interests

When coming up with your business idea, think about your skills and what you enjoy doing. Does your idea require a certain license or certificate? Many trades require a license, but don't let that be a barrier. Search trade schools and programs.

Startup Costs

If this is your first business venture, consider something that involves lower start-up costs. Think about what you already have access to, and what supplies you will need to purchase to start your business. Do some online research and talk to other small business owners to hear their experience and advice.

• Compile a list of all items and associated costs to calculate what capital you need to get started. If you are going to ask others to invest in your business, they will likely want to know how the money will be spent. Be thorough and consider expenses for the first year.

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Step 3: Find Funding

The amount of money you need to execute your idea will depend on what you already have available to you, what you need to begin, and what stage you are at in your business. There are many resources available to help small business owners find funding.

Grant Programs

Grants are provided by government and charitable foundations to fund new ideas and projects. Many types of grants are available for entrepreneurs, depending on what stage you are at with your business. Plus, grants do not have to be paid back.

- Grants.gov makes it easy to search and filter for grants in one location.
- Some corporations offer money and other business-related services through contest like FedEx Grant Contest and Incfile Fresh Start Business Grant.

Loans

Business loans are another option. However, unlike grants, they must be paid back and usually involve interest. Loans consider your credit and may have other requirements such as income or revenue. Luckily, there are loans available for those with poor credit. Short-term loans and Small Business Administration (SBA) microloans can be good alternatives to traditional business loans.

Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding is a donation-based form of raising money. There are online platforms available to share your story and business goals to garner donations from people. The benefit of crowdfunding is there are no eligibility requirements, and you do not have to pay back the money, though the platform will take a small percentage of donations raised.

- IndieGoGo allows you to raise funds for a variety of business ventures, as well as other nonprofit and community projects.
- Kickstarter focuses on creative projects that are shared with others, such as technology, art ,and events.
- GoFundMe is used to raise money for specific causes such as medical, animal, or education, but campaigning for business funds is allowed too.

Step 4: Market Your Business

Once you set up the business, it's time to get your first customer. Begin by letting friends or family know about your new business.

- Social media is a free and effective way to promote your business. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook allow you to reach a broad audience. Down the road, you can purchase ads or boost your posts to further grow your business.
- Print business cards to distribute around town. Include the type of services or goods you offer and your contact information.
- Print and post flyers, or create signs you can post on the ground.
- Talk to other local businesses to see if they will advertise your company. For example, if you start a handyman company, speak to your local hardware store and ask them to post your business cards or flyers.

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