



Small Business Starter Kit

A GUIDE TO STARTING *your* SMALL BUSINESS



Who we are

The St. Catharines Enterprise Centre is a resource and training hub for small businesses in St. Catharines and the surrounding area. We assist entrepreneurs in the early stages of ideation, as well as existing businesses looking to grow and expand.

The Enterprise Centre is a unique partnership between Ontario's Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, and the City of St. Catharines' Economic Development and Tourism Services department (EDTS). The office is part of a network of 47 similar Small Business Enterprise Centres including an office in Niagara Falls, and a wide variety of business support services.

Located in the heart of Downtown St. Catharines, the SCEC works closely with entrepreneurs with the goal of helping more businesses start and succeed.

This document aims to help entrepreneurs in the early stages of opening their business and provides guidance in taking the first steps required to get up and running.

For more established businesses and businesses that have completed all of the steps in this Start-up Kit, we encourage you to explore our other services and book a 1-on-1 consultation for more personalized assistance.

► To book an appointment [visit our website.](#)

SERVICES & PROGRAMS



**1-on-1
Consultations**



**Business Plan
Guidance**



**Marketing Plan
Assistance**



**Training &
Seminars**



**Small Business
Starter Kit**



**Funding
Information**



**Networking
Opportunities**

**Starter Company
Plus Program**

**Summer Company
Program**



Small Business Checklist

Are you on track to start your business?
Find out using this checklist.

- Determine your business idea
- Conduct market research
- Plan your business
- Make a startup budget and find funding
- Set goals
- Identify key people (professionals, staff, mentors, etc.)
- Choose your business structure
- Choose and register your business name
- Obtain necessary permits, licenses and insurance
- Register with the CRA
- Set up a business bank account
- Set up your record keeping
- Prepare branding and marketing material
- Plan your launch

Exploring Entrepreneurship

Becoming an entrepreneur is an exciting journey that involves creativity, resilience, and continuous learning. It is important to take inventory of your personal traits, strengths and weaknesses, and overall situation, to decide if you are ready to start a business. Once you have evaluated your own personal readiness, it is important to figure out what business idea to pursue. [Use this quiz to assess your readiness.](#)

CHOOSING A BUSINESS IDEA

Selecting a business idea is a crucial step on your entrepreneurial journey. Here are some questions to consider to find the right fit:

1

Is there a need? / Does it solve a problem?

Successful businesses typically address real-world problems. Consider what issues or pain points exist in your community or industry. Does your business provide a solution or fill a gap?

2

What are you passionate about?

Choose a business that resonates with you and aligns with your personal goals, lifestyle, and passions.

3

What are you good at?

Look at your existing skills, knowledge, and experience. A good business idea should ideally align with your expertise, minimizing the need for extensive training. Leverage what you already know.

4

What are your start-up costs?

Consider the upfront investment needed to start the business. Will you need to acquire additional funding? Manage costs by starting small and expanding as you grow.

5

Is your idea profitable?

Does it have a viable market? Before fully committing, test your business idea by starting as a side project or hobby. Gather feedback from friends, family, or potential customers and adjust based on their input.

6

Who are your customers and competitors?

Are enough people looking for your product or service? Have you identified who your competitors are and identified trends in the industry?

Are You Ready to Get Started?

**BECOME A CLIENT OF THE
ST. CATHARINES ENTERPRISE CENTRE
AND BOOK A CONSULTATION**

Getting Started

CHOOSING A BUSINESS STRUCTURE

An important step in developing a business is determining the type of legal structure the business will hold. The structure will determine features such as taxation, organization, liability, etc. In Ontario, the common types of business structures include sole-proprietorships, partnerships, and corporations. The advantages and disadvantages of each type are listed in the table below:

TYPE OF STRUCTURE	DESCRIPTION	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Sole-Proprietorship	This is where the business and the owner are the same legal entity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Owned by one person Low start-up cost Minimum regulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unlimited liability Difficult to raise capital Credit is dependent on the owner's personal credit
Partnership	A partnerships is where two or more individuals share ownership of the business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ease of formation Shared management /work duties Shared financing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners often have conflicts Liable for all debts and obligations Partnership agreement is required
Corporation	A new separate legal entity is established	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited legal and financial liabilities Tax advantages Continue its existence Ownership is transferable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expensive to start Closely regulated More complex record keeping More administration

REGISTER YOUR BUSINESS NAME

Businesses operating under any name other than the legal name of the business owner must register the business name with the [Ontario Business Registry](#).

Register your business name at:

- [Ontario.ca](#) (Cost: \$60-\$300)
- [Ownr.co](#) (Cost \$49-\$300)



Financing & Funding

ASSESSING FINANCIAL NEEDS

Most businesses get started with a combination of personal and family investment and borrowed funds. Sometimes, there are opportunities to apply for financial incentives, subsidies or grants. Contact our centre to discuss funding your business. Frequently accessed funding sources include:



SMALL BUSINESS LOANS

- [Venture Niagara CFDC](#)
- [Futurpreneur](#)
- [BDC](#)
- Local banks or credit unions

Note: Please take caution when researching funding opportunities. Not all sources of grants opportunities are credible, and you should never be pressured into purchasing business planning services to apply for funding.

GRANTS AND SUBSIDIES

- [Business Benefit Finder](#)
- [Invest Ontario](#)
- [Fundica](#)
- Visit [InvestinSTC.ca](#) for information on:
 - Starter Company Plus
 - Summer Company



The Business Plan

A business plan is an important document that explains the operations and goals of your business, and it is often a required document when applying for grants and loans. It should be prepared by the person launching the business and act as a detailed roadmap of steps to take for the business to be successful.

A business plan is a separate and more detailed document than a [Business Model Canvas](#), which provides a one-page overview of the key features and activities of a business.

- ▶ [Contact our office](#) to request a business plan template, or to book a business plan review session.



Licenses and Regulations

It is important to research the legal requirements, including licenses and regulations, that apply to your business and industry.

To research the legal requirements of starting your specific business, we recommend using BizPal.ca as a starting point and we suggest checking to see if there is an industry organization which has information specific to your business. It is important to check with each level of government (Municipal, Regional, Provincial and Federal) to verify requirements.

Municipal Regulations will typically include business licensing, zoning and building permits.

NOTE: Zoning regulates the use of land and the character, location and use of buildings and structures within the city. It is important to verify if your specific business is permitted at the location in which you intend to operate. Home based businesses should inquire about the home occupation bylaw.

Regional Regulations will include licensing and public health approvals and inspections for certain types of businesses. Visit NiagaraHealth.ca for [licensing requirements](#) and [public health resources](#).

Provincial Regulations vary by industry, refer to BizPal.ca and Ontario.ca for information.

Federal Regulations vary by industry as well, refer to BizPal.ca and the [Business Regulation Guide](#) from FedDev Ontario as a starting point.

Most businesses will need a Business Number from Canada Revenue Agency for the purposes of Payroll, HST, Import/Export, and Corporate Income Tax. Businesses engaging in import or export activity will need to [register with Canada Border Services Agency](#).

▶ *[Attend our Steps to Starting information session](#) to better understand how to research the regulations that pertain to your business.*

Canada Revenue Agency Registration

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY (CRA) BUSINESS NUMBER (BN)

A Business Number is required to activate CRA program accounts including: payroll, import/export, GST/HST, and corporate income tax. It is free to register for a BN. Register for a BN by calling the CRA at 1-800-959-5525 or visiting the [CRA Business Registration Online](#).

HST

You must register for HST if your gross annual sales are more than \$30,000. You can register voluntarily if your taxable sales are less than \$30,000, but once registered you must begin collecting and remitting the HST. [Learn more about HST for Business](#).

PAYROLL

A payroll account is an account number assigned to either an employer, a trustee or a payer of other amounts related to employment to identify themselves when dealing with the CRA. This facilitates reporting of payroll deductions and remittances for CPP, EI and income tax.

[Find more information about payroll](#).

CORPORATE INCOME TAX

If your business is federally, provincially or territorially incorporated, or if you are a non-resident corporation operating in Canada, you have to file Form T2, [Corporation Income Tax Return](#).



NOTE FOR SOLE-PROPRIETORS AND PARTNERSHIPS:

You will be required to report both your business and professional income on your individual tax return. You will be allowed to claim and deduct your business expenses, but not your personal expenses.

For more information, refer to the Canada Revenue Agency's Business and Professional Income Guide including the [T2125 Form](#), or contact the Canada Revenue Agency directly for more information about taxation as it applies to your business.





Marketing

1 Market Research

Understanding your target audience, industry trends, and your competitor's strengths and weaknesses, will help you make informed business decisions and find your place in the market. Gather information by using online tools, conducting surveys or hosting interviews. A **Customer Persona** and **SWOT Analysis** can be helpful tools for organizing your findings and understanding your market.

3 Traditional Marketing

Traditional marketing is a great way to establish a physical presence in your community. Consider using print materials like flyers, brochures, and business cards to promote your business. Network at local events, join relevant community groups, and partner with other businesses to create a more personal connection with your audience.

2 Brand Development

A strong brand is essential to stand out in a competitive market. It is **more than just a logo** - it includes your message, tone, and values. Create consistent visual elements and a clear message that will resonate with your target audience. Be consistent across all aspects of your business, from customer interactions to marketing materials, to establish a strong and recognizable identity.

4 Online Presence

An active online presence is important for findability, and builds credibility and trust with your audience. Help people find you online by creating a **Google Business Profile** and personalized website. Pick a few relevant social media channels where you know your audience is active and focus on posting consistent, quality content to engage with your customers.

► *Contact our office to discuss marketing your business.*

Hiring

As your business grows, you may need to hire some help. It is important to determine whether a worker is an employee or a self-employed individual.

It is important that you are aware of the various regulations when hiring employees including the [Employment Standards Act \(ESA\)](#) and the [Occupation Health and Safety Act \(OHSA\)](#). When you hire, you will need to register with the [Workplace Safety and Insurance Board \(WSIB\)](#) and you will need to set up payroll and deductions. Employers are responsible for deducting Canada Pension Plan (CPP) contributions, Employment Insurance (EI) premiums, and income tax from remuneration or other amounts they pay to their employees. They have to remit these deductions along with their share of CPP contributions and EI premiums, to the Canada Revenue Agency. [The Employer Health Tax \(EHT\)](#) is a payroll tax, small eligible employers are eligible for a tax exemption.

When hiring your first employee it is crucial that you have the following in place:

- Clear and detailed Job Description
- Policies and procedures
- Employment Contract (or offer letter)
- Adequate resources including tools and equipment
- A system for calculating and recording payroll
- A plan for onboarding and training (help them succeed!)

There are local organizations that can assist you with recruitment and they may have hiring incentives and other programs to support you:

- [YMCA Employer Services](#)
- [Job Gym](#)
- [Niagara College Employment Services](#)
- [Employment Ontario](#)

SUBCONTRACTORS

If you plan to hire subcontractors instead of employees, it is important to verify if they are truly subcontractors or if they should be an employee. Learn more about this [here](#).

▶ *Want more info on how to hire?*

Book a consultation with us!



DESCRIPTION	SOURCE
Entrepreneurial Potential Self-Assessment BDC	BDC.ca
10 Steps to Start a Business in Ontario for Entrepreneurs START A BUSINESS IN ONTARIO	Ontario.ca
Build your Business Knowledge SMALL BUSINESS CENTRES ONTARIO	SBCOntario.ca
Planning a Business GOVERNMENT OF CANADA	Canada.ca
Futurpreneur Resource Library FUTURPRENEUR	Futurpreneur.ca
Marketing Resources DIGITAL MAIN STREET COURSES	DigitalMainStreet.ca
Downtown Business Directory ST. CATHARINES DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION	MyDowntown.ca
St. Catharines Economic Development ST. CATHARINES ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	InvestInSTC.ca
Economic Development Strategy NIAGARA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	NiagaraCanada.com
Small Business Services FEDERAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY	FedDevOntario.Canada.ca
Commercialize Innovative Ideas INNOVATE NIAGARA	InnovateNiagara.com
Intellectual Property PATENTS, TRADEMARKS AND COPYRIGHT	Cipo.gc.ca
Food Products and Regulations CANADIAN FOOD INSPECTION AGENCY MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS HEALTH CANADA FOODPRENEUR NIAGARA REGION PUBLIC HEALTH	Inspection.gc.ca Omafra.gov.on.ca Canada.ca Foodpreneuradvantage.ca NiagaraRegion.ca/health
Import and Export Resources CANADA BORDER SERVICES IMPORT GUIDE EXPORT GUIDE	cbsa-asfc.gc.ca cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/import cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/export



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