



BEAM

BUSINESS EMPOWERMENT AND MENTORSHIP

BUSINESS START-UP GUIDE

A Step-by-Step Roadmap
for Starting a Business in
Santa Barbara County

ABOUT BUSINESS EMPOWERMENT AND MENTORSHIP

Starting a new business is exciting—but navigating permits, licenses, taxes, and setup requirements can feel overwhelming. The BEAM Business Start-Up Guide provides entrepreneurs and small business owners with a clear, practical starting point for launching a business in Santa Barbara County.

This guide outlines common steps, agencies, and considerations involved in starting a business. Requirements and regulations may change, and this information is not legal, tax, or financial advice. For guidance specific to your situation, consult a licensed professional.

Some industries require additional permits, certifications, or regulatory approvals. Always confirm requirements with the appropriate city, county, state, and federal agencies where your business will operate.

BEAM (Business Empowerment & Mentorship) provides free, confidential, local mentoring to help entrepreneurs understand these requirements, avoid common mistakes, and move forward with confidence.

LET'S GET STARTED!

RESEARCH & BUSINESS PLANNING

MARKET FEASIBILITY (DO NOT SKIP THIS STEP)

Before launching, research your industry and target market thoroughly. Evaluate competitors locally, regionally, and—when applicable—nationally or internationally.

Key questions to answer:

- What problem does your product or service solve?
- What makes your offering different or better?
- Who is your ideal customer?
- How will customers find and choose you?

Market feasibility answers a critical question:

Is there a real market willing to pay—at a price that supports profitability? Is there a problem in the market place and what is your solution?

This should be completed before filing paperwork, signing leases, or making major purchases.

KEY ELEMENTS OF MARKET FEASIBILITY

1. **Customer Definition**
Who the customer is, who buys, and who uses the product or service.
2. **Problem Validation**
The problem must exist, be recognized, and be worth paying to solve.
3. **Competitive Landscape**
Direct competitors, indirect alternatives, and current workarounds.
4. **Pricing Reality**
Pricing must align with customer expectations and support margins.
5. **Market Size & Reach**
Focus on reachable customers, not theoretical market size.
6. **Sales & Distribution Feasibility**
How customers find you, sales cycle length, and acquisition cost.

7. Unit Economics

Revenue per customer, cost to deliver, margin, and break-even volume.

HOW TO TEST FEASIBILITY

Customer interviews, surveys, pilots, pricing comparisons, and pre-orders.

BEAM Mentor Guidance

A BEAM mentor can help evaluate feasibility objectively before costly commitments.

BUSINESS PLAN

A business plan helps clarify your idea and is often required when seeking financing.

A strong business plan typically includes:

- Business overview
- Product or service description
- Target market and competition
- Sales and marketing strategy
- Operations plan
- Financial projections
- Start-up capital requirements

Helpful planning tools include:

- **SBA Business Plan Guides**
Step-by-step templates for writing a traditional business plan
- **Business Model Canvas**
A one-page visual framework to map out your value proposition, customers, revenue streams, costs, and key activities
- **Economic Development Collaborative (EDC)**
Business planning tools, workshops, and technical assistance that support entrepreneurs during the start-up and early growth stages

- **Financial Planning Worksheets**

Tools for budgeting, cash flow, and basic financial projections

- **AI Business Plan Tools**

AI-powered tools that can help generate draft business plans, financial assumptions, market summaries, and scenario models. These tools are best used as a starting point and should be reviewed carefully for accuracy and relevance

A BEAM mentor can help you decide whether a one-page canvas, a full business plan, support from partner organizations, or an AI-assisted draft is the right approach for your business stage and goals.

BUSINESS NAME & STRUCTURE

CHOOSING A BUSINESS NAME

Select a name that is:

- Unique
- Non-descriptive
- Non-generic

Before finalizing a name:

1. Search the USPTO TESS database for trademarks
2. Check availability on the California Secretary of State website
3. Perform a general online search to identify unregistered but existing uses.
Inadequate research can lead to trademark conflicts, forced name changes, or legal challenges later.

BUSINESS ENTITY SELECTION

Common business structures include:

- Sole Proprietor
- Partnership
- LLC
- Corporation

Before forming an LLC, corporation, or partnership, consult a licensed California attorney and a CPA to understand liability, tax, and compliance implications.

PERMITS & LICENSES (DO NOT ASSUME — CONFIRM EARLY)

Permit and license requirements vary by location, industry, and activity. Do not assume a general business license is sufficient.

Common permit categories include:

- Zoning
- Home occupation
- Health
- Fire
- Environmental
- Sheriff-regulated
- Professional licenses

Confirm requirements **before** opening, advertising, or signing a lease.

LOCAL PERMIT & LICENSE ASSISTANCE

Each city and the County of Santa Barbara administers its own business requirements.

LOCAL PERMIT CONTACT INFORMATION	
City	Phone
Buellton	(805) 688-5177
Carpinteria	(805) 684-5405
Goleta	(805) 961-7500
Lompoc	(805) 736-1261
Santa Barbara	(805) 963-0611
Santa Barbara County	(805) 568-3400
Santa Maria	(805) 925-0951
Solvang	(805) 688-5575

UNINCORPORATED AREAS OF SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

Businesses operating outside city limits must obtain a County Business Tax Certificate, even if based in a city but operating in unincorporated areas.

County of Santa Barbara – Hall of Records (County Clerk-Recorder)
 1100 Anacapa St., Santa Barbara, CA 93101
 805-568-2250

FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME (DBA)

A Fictitious Business Name is required if operating under a name that does not match the legal owner(s).

<https://www.countyofsb.org/525/Fictitious-Business-Names>

STATE TAXES & REGISTRATION

California Department of Tax & Fee Administration (CDTFA)

Seller's permits and resale certificates

<https://cdtfa.ca.gov/>

California Tax Service Center

Centralized state tax information

<https://www.taxes.ca.gov/>

Employment Development Department (EDD)

Required if paying employees or certain contractors

<https://edd.ca.gov/>

Employer Identification Number (EIN)

Apply online through the IRS

<https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/get-an-employer-identification-number>

Business Credit (D-U-N-S Number)

Establishes business credit

<https://www.dnb.com/>

PERMIT ASSISTANCE RESOURCES

- CalGOLD – <https://www.calgold.ca.gov/>
- Governor's Office of Business & Economic Development (GO-Biz) – <https://business.ca.gov/>

INSURANCE, BANKING & OPERATIONS

INSURANCE

- General liability
- Workers' compensation (if hiring)
- Industry-specific coverage

BANKING & BOOKKEEPING

- Open a separate business bank account
- Track income and expenses monthly
- Keep all business and personal finances completely separate
- Prepare for estimated quarterly taxes

CONTRACTS

Common agreements include:

- Client/service agreements
- Independent contractor agreements
- Vendor agreements
- Partnership agreement (if more than one owner)
- Operating agreements

Contracts should be reviewed by a licensed attorney.

ONLINE & DIGITAL PRESENCE

- Domain name
- Professional email
- Website or landing page

If bootstrapping, it is acceptable to begin with a simple informational social media business page before investing significantly in a website. Update your LinkedIn profile to reflect the new business.

CONTINUING EDUCATION & TRAINING

- LinkedIn Learning – <https://www.linkedin.com/learning/>
- SBCC Center for Lifelong Learning – <https://www.sbcc.edu/cll/>
- CreativeLive – <https://www.creativelive.com/>

BUSINESS SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

- Economic Development Collaborative (EDC)
- Women’s Economic Ventures (WEV) – <https://www.wevonline.org/>

HOW BEAM SUPPORTS YOU

BEAM (Business Empowerment & Mentorship) provides free, confidential mentoring focused on clarity, sequencing, and execution.

Learn more or register at beamsb.com

DISCLAIMER

This guide is provided for educational and informational purposes only and does not constitute legal, tax, accounting, or financial advice.

Before making decisions related to business formation, permits, contracts, taxes, employment, or liability, consult a licensed California attorney, CPA, or appropriate agency.