

Retail Guide



Choose a Location

Find a location zoned for your business. Every location is zoned differently - some could require a “Change of Use” or “Conditional Use” application, which can include a public hearing and neighborhood notification.

businessportal.sfgov.org/start/location-options

Visit the SF Planning Department’s Planning Information Counter at 1660 Mission St. to understand zoning and building codes. These requirements will determine where you open your shop. **sf-planning.org**

Review Americans with Disability Act (ADA) guidelines to make sure your business is accessible.
businessportal.sfgov.org/location-options/ada

Sign your lease. Leases can be tricky, so review the lease carefully with a lawyer before signing.

NOTE Your landlord is required to provide information about the accessibility of the building, in case it needs renovations.



Set Up Your Business

Create a plan for the type of shop you will open.
businessportal.sfgov.org/start/create-a-plan

Choose a business structure. LLCs, Corporations, and Limited Partnerships must register their structure with CA Secretary of State before registering locally.
businessportal.sfgov.org/start/choose-a-structure

Apply for an Employer Identification Number (EIN), also known as a Federal Tax ID Number from the IRS. This is used to identify your business and allows you to hire employees. If you are a sole proprietor without employees, you may choose to use your Social Security Number instead.

Register your business with the City through the Office of the Treasurer and Tax Collector (TTX) and the Office of the Assessor-Recorder.
businessportal.sfgov.org/start/register-your-business

NOTE If you register your business before choosing a final location, you will have to update your registration with the new address. This can cost money and time.

Choose and file a business name. File a Fictitious Business Name (FBN) Statement at the SF Office of the County Clerk if you will be using a name other than your given name, the names of your partners, or the officially registered name of your LLC or corporation. Research the name’s availability in your county before filing.
businessportal.sfgov.org/start/choose-a-name

Apply for a Seller’s Permit from the CA State Board of Equalization. Every location must have this permit to sell taxable goods..



Prepare your Space

New Construction: Submit plans and documents to the SF Department of Building Inspection. Change and resubmit plans as needed.
businessportal.sfgov.org/start/location-options

Identify any hazardous materials that you will store, handle, or use. Storing hazardous materials may require modifications to your space and approval from the Fire Department and/or the Department of Public Health (DPH). Your staff will also need to be licensed to handle or use any hazardous materials
sf-fire.org
sfdph.org

NOTE If you will store hazardous materials, DPH will conduct inspections at least every 3 years, but you must also complete quarterly self-inspections.

Gas and Electric Services: If your business needs new or additional gas or electric services, contact PG&E Building and Renovation Services to start the application process.
pge.com

Transit Impact Development Fee: If your business will increase the number of people coming to your area, you may have to pay a Transit Impact Development Fee to the SF Municipal Transportation Agency (MTA). **sfmta.com**

NOTE Small businesses may be eligible for Transit Impact Development Fee waivers or reductions.

Signs: If you want to install or change a canopy or sign on the outside of the building, ensure you comply with the SF Planning Department sign guidelines. **sf-planning.org**

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Retail Services

Decide what you plan to sell. The types of items you sell, such as electronics, pets, antiques, or used equipment, will affect which permits and licenses you need. The Business Portal Permit Finder can help you determine which permits and licenses are necessary.

Do not use plastic check-out bags. Additionally, you must charge 10 ¢ for all allowable checkout bags. These include compostable bags, recycled paper bags, or reusable bags. sfenvironment.org/zero-waste



What If...

If you will have a Point of Sale (POS) station (aka cash register), you must register it with the SF Department of Public Health Weights and Measures Program.

NOTE Make sure your register is equipped to print your business name and address on your receipts.

If you plan to hire employees, be sure to follow all wage and employment guidelines.
businessportal.sfgov.org/start/hire-employees

If you plan to display merchandise on the sidewalk, you must be able to provide 6 ft. of sidewalk clearance and obtain a sidewalk display permit from the Department of Public Works (DPW).

If 50 people or more will gather in your shop at any time, you will need a Place of Assembly Permit from the SF Fire Department.

If you plan on playing music over speakers, you must obtain a music license from at least one of the major music companies, like Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI) or the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP). Stores under 3,750 SQ FT are exempt.

bmi.com
ascap.com

If you want bike racks in front of your shop, you must follow the SF Municipal Transportation Agency (MTA) bicycle parking guidelines. The MTA installs racks for short-term bike parking (under two hours) in the public right-of-way (on the sidewalk or in the parking lane) by request, at no charge.



After Opening

Post all required posters and permits including No Smoking signs, minimum wage information, health inspection results, etc.

Mark your calendar. Schedule equipment maintenance and set reminders to renew your permits and licenses as needed.

Prepare and pay your local, state, and federal taxes. Learn more from these departments:

sftreasurer.org
sfassessor.org
ftb.ca.gov
irs.gov



To speak with a business counselor
visit the Office of Small Business

City Hall, Room 110
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102
(415) 554-6134