

Bar 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 bar. **sf-planning.org**

ⓘ **NOTE** Taking over a space that already was a bar saves time and construction costs, as long as the bar had recently passed inspections and was in compliance with current requirements.

ⓘ **NOTE** If you plan to serve liquor or beer and wine, check if your potential location allows alcohol. Be sure to start your liquor license application early.

Review the DPH Construction Guidelines and visit the SF Fire Department to determine if you need to make changes to your space. You must consider sprinkler systems, kitchen hoods, fire exits, capacity requirements, etc.
sfdph.org
sf-fire.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 bar 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, 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.
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.

Obtain worker’s compensation insurance. You will need this in order to obtain the Department of Public Health (DPH) Permit to Operate.



Prepare your Space

Water and Wastewater Capacity Charge: If your business will use more water than the previous business or resident, you may have to pay a capacity charge to the SF Public Utilities Commission (PUC). **sfwater.org**

ⓘ **NOTE** Get an estimate of the water capacity charge from the PUC before you sign a lease. This fee can be high, especially if your location was not a bar before.

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 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**

ⓘ **NOTE** You may serve light snacks such as pretzels and peanuts at your bar, without a kitchen. If you wish to serve heavier fare, you must follow the food and kitchen requirements of a Full or Limited Restaurant.

Bar Guide



Food & Alcohol

Obtain a Manager's Food Safety Certification for yourself and/or a designated employee. This person is responsible for teaching other employees proper food handling.

Ensure all employees have a Food Handler Card. SF DPH offers a few options for obtaining this card.

Apply for your Food Establishment Permit to Operate from the SF Department of Public Health within 6-8 weeks of your planned open date. Your application will require Proof of Worker's Compensation Insurance, Proof of Food Safety Certification, and a Business Registration Certificate.

Obtain a Liquor License from the CA Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC).

NOTE Be prepared to wait 3-6 months for your liquor license to be issued. After applying, a notice will be posted at your location to alert the general public that you plan on serving alcohol. If there are no objections, the department will conduct a background investigation and, if cleared, issue the permit.

NOTE Liquor licenses can be transferred or purchased from an old owner of a bar though you will often pay a premium.

Don't serve any foods containing trans fats, per California State law. SFDPH enforces the trans fat compliance program to ensure that no food containing artificial trans fat is stored, distributed, served, or used in the preparation of any food.
sfdph.org

Use containers that are compostable or recyclable if you serve takeout or allow customers to take food home. The SF Mandatory Recycling and Composting Ordinance prohibits certain food service ware, like Styrofoam containers.
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.

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

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

If you wish to have outdoor tables and chairs, you must be able to provide 6 ft. of sidewalk clearance and obtain a permit from the Department of Public Works (DPW).

NOTE If you plan to offer outdoor seating, be sure your alcohol license covers serving outdoors.

If you will offer entertainment activities like live music or billiards (pool), you should start applications with the SF Entertainment Commission early and in sequence so you can open on schedule.

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). Bars under 3,750 SQ FT are exempt.
bmi.com
ascap.com

If you plan on having candles in your bar, you'll need an Open Flame Permit from the SF Fire Department.

If you want bike racks in front of your bar, 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.

Limit the noise from your establishment. Noise complaints from neighbors can negatively affect your business.

Consider purchasing commercial liability insurance for your bar. This will protect your business from financial loss stemming from lawsuits filed by employees or others. This insurance is not mandatory in California.

Be prepared for SFDPH Health Inspections by checking walls, floors, and ceilings for damage; following best practices for food storage; collecting garbage; and ensuring workers have good hygiene. sfdph.org

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