

**HOW TO START A BUSINESS IN  
DONALSONVILLE - SEMINOLE COUNTY  
GEORGIA**



**COMPILED BY THE  
DONALSONVILLE/SEMINOLE  
COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

# **How to Start a Business in Donalsonville – Seminole County Georgia**

## **Information for New of Prospective Business Owners**

The Donalsonville/Seminole County Chamber of Commerce and the Development Authority of Seminole County and Donalsonville have developed this document to provide basic start-up information for persons starting their own businesses. This site also provides new business owners and entrepreneurs with suggested internet sites that provide a wealth of valuable information.

As a prospective business owner, your first step is to write a well-conceived Business Plan. Once your business plan is written, the closest source of detailed information on starting your own business is the Small Business Development Center Office located in Albany, Georgia. Our Donalsonville/Seminole County Chamber of Commerce & Development Authority Office will be glad to set up a meeting for you with a SBDC agency member or you can call the Albany Office directly. The Small Business Development Center office is located in Albany, Georgia, 125 Pine Avenue, Suite 142, Albany, Georgia 31701; phone 229-420-1144; web: <https://www.georgiasbdc.org/albany-office/>.

## A Checklist for New Businesses

(Please note: this list is not intended to be all-inclusive nor is it written in any particular order of priority. Further, all items may not pertain to you depending on the type of business you plan to operate. Please contact your nearest Small Business Development Center for assistance in starting a new business. The SBDC network in Georgia is a partnership between the Federal Small Business Administration and the University of Georgia, and they provide new business start-up information at no cost.)

- Write a well-conceived Business Plan. Consult your accountant and attorney when finalizing your Business Plan. All financial institutions will require a well-written Business Plan. A good Business Plan will include an analysis of your product or service market, a break-even analysis, financial projections for your first three years of business, and financial reports (income tax returns) of the owner(s).
- Determine if your company will operate as a Corporation, a Partnership, a Sole Proprietorship, a Limited Liability Company (LLC), or a non-profit organization.
- One of the most difficult steps is to find the means to finance your business. There are basically three ways to finance start-up costs: use your own money, obtain a loan(s), or find investors. Visit your area's Small Business Administration Office for a list of possible sources of Small Business Loans or Grants. In Donalsonville, the nearest Small Business Office is located in Albany, Georgia, 125 Pine Avenue, Suite 142, Albany, Georgia 31701; phone 229-420-1144; web: <https://www.georgiasbdc.org/albany-office/>.
- If your business will be an LLC or a Corporation, you must obtain the proper applications from the Georgia Secretary of State's Office. If your business is already operating in another state contact the Secretary of State's Office to receive the proper application to do business in the new state that you wish to operate. Georgia corporations, limited liability companies and limited partnerships are formed by filing with the Corporations Division of the Office of Georgia Secretary of State. Registration forms from the Georgia Secretary of State can be downloaded from this website: [www.sos.state.ga.us/corporations](http://www.sos.state.ga.us/corporations).
- Decide on your business name. You must register your business name. You must register your business trade name with the clerk of the Superior Court in the county in which your business is licensed. The Seminole County Clerk of the Superior Court phone number is 229-524-2525.

- If you as the business owner have any employees, you must apply for a Federal Employer Identification Number (EIN) by filling out the Form SS-4. You may also call the local IRS TELE-TIN hotline service, or visit the IRS's website: [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov). Also see the following IRS site for documents and booklets on income taxes required and Self Employment Tax information: <http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/article/0,,id=99336,00.html>
- Also, see IRS Publication 15 (Circular E), Employer's Tax Guide that includes instructions for withholding and paying federal employment taxes and filing the proper forms. (see <http://www.irs.gov/publications/p15/index.html>) Most prospective business owners find that a Certified Public Accountant is necessary to insure that all federal employment and income tax laws are followed correctly.
- Apply for a State Sales Tax Number if you plan to sell a taxable product or service (<https://dor.georgia.gov/tax-registration> or call the Taxpayer Services Division at 877-GADOR11 / 877-423-6711). If you have employees, you can apply for a state withholding ID # on the same form (CRF-002). Also, the State of Georgia Department of Revenue has an Employer's Tax Guide on their website: [https://dor.georgia.gov/sites/dor.georgia.gov/files/related\\_files/document/2016\\_W\\_H\\_Employers\\_Tax\\_Guide.pdf](https://dor.georgia.gov/sites/dor.georgia.gov/files/related_files/document/2016_W_H_Employers_Tax_Guide.pdf) that includes instructions for state income tax withholding.
- Contact the Georgia Department of Labor to find out about unemployment regulations that all employers must follow. Employers normally must pay a state unemployment tax (SUTA) and a federal unemployment tax (FUTA). See [http://www.dol.state.ga.us/ui\\_rules.html](http://www.dol.state.ga.us/ui_rules.html) for SUTA guidelines. See <http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/international/article/0,,id=104985,00.html> for federal information.
- Contact the Georgia State Board of Workers Compensation <http://www.sbcw.georgia.gov/sites/sbcw.georgia.gov/files/Rules2016.pdf> to determine what's required for compliance with the Workers Compensation Act. (This is not necessary for a sole proprietorship without employees/)
- If your business is within the City of Donalsonville, you must file for an Occupational Tax Certificate which is the Business License required for Donalsonville. The cost of the Tax Certificate will be based on the projected revenue and number of employees in your business. Additional state licenses may be required for some types of businesses such as nursing homes, child care centers, restaurants, hotels, etc. Contact the Georgia Secretary of State's office if you are starting one of these businesses.

## STARTING A BUSINESS IN DONALSONVILLE AND SEMINOLE COUNTY

- Occupational Tax Certificate:

Prior to opening your business it is important to contact the City of Donalsonville at 229-524-2118 and Seminole County at 229-524-2878 to apply for an Occupational Tax Certificate. In some cases, you may not need a license.

This document assures the proper business is conducted in the appropriate zoning location of the City. It is an annual certification that having been filed once continues to be renewed and billed until further notification.

- Inspections :

City of Donalsonville, Christina Covers—229-524-2118

Seminole County, Paula Granger—229-524-2878

Health Department, Edwin Irvin—229-524-2577

- Utilities

Gas, City of Donalsonville—229-524-2118

Water/Sewer, City of Donalsonville—229-524-2118

Garbage, City of Donalsonville—229-524-2118

County, Seminole Sanitation—229-861-2064

Electricity, Georgia Power Company—1-888-655-5888

Three Notch, EMC—229-524-5377

Telephone/Internet, Windstream—229-723-8585

Mediacom—855-633-4226

- If you plan to operate your business from your home, check with the City of Donalsonville if you live within the city limits or the Seminole County Commissioners Office (229-534-2878) if you live in Seminole County but outside the city limits to ensure compliance with all local requirements.

- Contact the Bureau of Labor Standards office to determine what is necessary for compliance with the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA).

<http://www.osha.gov/>

- Contact the Georgia Department of Revenue (<http://dor.georgia.gov/>) to request the proper paperwork for Business Registration and to receive instructions on withholding and paying state income taxes, sales tax, excise tax, etc.

Other considerations for your new business will include the following:

- Lease, buy, or rent your business location. Check with your zoning office. Set up your utilities, internet, and phone services.
- Hire employees.
- Plan your advertising and marketing strategies.
- Open your business!
- Join your local Chamber of Commerce for networking opportunities, referrals, and access to valuable resources (229-524-2588).

## TIMELINE FOR ENTREPRENEURS

Starting your own business is not something to be rushed into. Careful, advanced planning can ensure the success of your venture. The following is a suggested one-year plan:

### ONE YEAR BEFORE STARTUP

- Refine your ideas in writing. Determine exactly where you want to go.
- Decide what business you want to start. Be specific in your business definition.
- Assess the impact on your family and personal life; how will this affect your relationships? Will your family support the use of finances and time?
- Begin research. You must determine if there is a need for your product and service. This research can be performed by students, professionals, or even on your own.
- Build your personal skills by taking formal management/business courses. Contact Bainbridge State College or Albany Technical College for options.
- Contact the Small Business Development Center for assistance in writing a business plan and other business start-up services/
- Contact the Georgia Department of Labor for information on educational seminars on labor/safety issues.

### SIX MONTHS BEFORE START-UP

- Determine the focus on your business. What do you want to specialize in? it is easier to excel in one area than in many.
- Start writing your business plan.
- Define your target markets. Who is your intended clientele? Toward whom should you aim your advertising?
- Research business and trade organizations. Most areas of business have agencies and organizations set up to facilitate business. Take advantage of what these groups have to offer.
- Start looking for the best location for your business. Do you need little or lots of space? Would your business be better suited downtown or in a rural part of the county? Is a storefront location needed or can you work from your home? Location can make or break a business. Conduct the search on your own or contact a real estate agent.
- **WARNING:** Do not sign any leases or purchase documents.

## FOUR MONTHS BEFORE START-UP

- Name your business. Be careful in deciding on a name and beware that someone may already be using the name. Have a few back-up ideas. You can check to see if someone is already using a name by contacting the Georgia Office of the Secretary of State.
- Make a final selection of the business location. Make sure that the location you choose is within your budget and also fits into your business plan. Cheaper rent may cost you more in the long run. Remember: Location, Location, and Location.
- Select outside advisors. This will be a very hectic time. It will be beneficial to have people you can call on to listen to your ideas, problems, and plans. These people should be able to provide you with guidance, constructive criticism, and feedback. They should be people experienced and knowledgeable in business.
- Set up a network of mentors. Select people who can help you by giving you new insight and ideas.
- Choose your business's legal form. Will you be a partnership, sole proprietorship, or corporation? Legal form should be chosen very carefully as it can impact your business in many ways.
- Set up bookkeeping, accounting, and office systems. How are you going to operate your office? If you are going to keep your own books, make sure your skills are adequate. Will you need to hire a bookkeeper/bookkeeping firm?
- Seek outside demographic information on your targeted customer base. Gather secondary information.
- Continue working on your business plan.

## THREE MONTHS BEFORE START-UP

- Determine your cash needs. How much money do you need for start-up? What will be your monthly variable and fixed costs? What is your break-even point? These are all questions that must be answered. You must estimate your cash flows.
- Review preliminary financial objectives. How much profit do you expect to make? Are you planning on making investments? What is your intended cash flow?
- Decide on your pricing strategy. After determining your variable and fixed costs, decide what your markup rate will be. You will also need to consider demand and competitive factors in setting your price.
- Forecast sales. Contact the Small Business Development Center or others in your field to help you forecast accurately.
- Determine your company's employee needs. How many people do you need on your staff? This is important to decide as it affects your requirements for insurance, cash flow, etc.



- Project your cash flow. Write out an estimated statement of all revenues and expenditures. This statement should cover one calendar year. Also, project your net cash flow for the entire year.
- Continue working on and refining your business plan.

## TWO MONTHS BEFORE START-UP

- Prepare the marketing plan. How are you going to market your product and how much will it cost? Are you going to use publicity? Are you going to use paid advertisement? You must decide how you will go about introducing your business to the public.
- Get your business license.
- Review non-financial objectives (public image, legal questions). How do you want the public to see your business? Are you a family establishment or geared more toward adults? What form is your business taking: do you have all legal documents needed?
- Prepare a preliminary balance sheet. Contact the Small Business Development Center for assistance.
- Secure necessary financing. Whether through a private lender or through other sources, you must obtain the necessary amount of start-up capital.
- Secure insurance coverage if applicable.
- Determine advertising, promotion, and public relations strategies.
- Order opening inventories. Talk to your suppliers for estimated opening need.
- Complete improvements to your facility.
- Start your hiring process. (Contact the Department of Labor).
- Refine your business plan. It is suggested you not proceed with the following steps unless you have received a firm commitment for all necessary funds.

## ONE MONTH BEFORE START-UP

- Fine-tune your cash flow budget.
- Prepare for your grand opening. The Donalsonville/Seminole County Chamber of Commerce can be of assistance in planning your event. Be creative but practical.
- Set up your office, display areas, etc. Have everything exactly as you want it. The last few days before opening are not the time to do this. The look of your store or office sets the tone for your business. You should put thought and time into it.
- Review your final checklist.
- Hire your staff.
- Make sure everything works. It is better to find out that your equipment does not work in advance. In that case, you can make any necessary repairs and be ready to open your doors on time.

- Implement marketing, promotion, and opening plans. This will be a good time to start advertising in local newspapers, radio, and television if your budget permits. Remember: word of mouth is your most powerful publicity. It is also the least expensive. Spread the word.

## START-UP AND AFTER

- Budget your time. As a new business owner, your time will be precious. Schedule your time wisely. It is important to get the maximum use of time you have available. You might consider reading some time management materials or speaking with someone who you think manages time wisely.
- Continuously update your product/service. What is good about your product? Make it better. What doesn't work with your product? Eliminate the problem as much as possible. If people patronize your business for the original product, an improved product can only increase that.
- LISTEN to your customers, advisors, and vendors. The customers are your cash flow. It is important to gather their opinions and put them to use. Their ideas can be helpful in updating your product. LISTEN to your advisors. You asked them to advise you for a reason. Let them guide you. LISTEN to your vendors. These provide you with money-saving or moneymaking ideas.
- Check cash flow budget against actual performance.
- Maintain good communications with your bankers and vendors. By keeping the lines of communication open, you are helping yourself. Should you need their help in the future, you will be more likely to receive it.
- Continue to improve the 5 C's of credit (Character, Collateral, Capacity, Capital, and Condition).
- Work with investors. Make sure you are in contact with them. Make sure you understand the conditions of your repayment. When are payments due? Make sure you fulfill all obligations to investors. You may need to call them again someday.
- Check cost of living budget. If you are drawing money from the company for living expenses, be sure to take only what is necessary. Stick tightly to your budget.
- CONSIDER DELAYING YOUR OFFICIAL GRAND OPENING/RIBBON CUTTING UNTIL YOU'VE BEEN IN BUSINESS FOR A COUPLE OF WEEKS. If you do, you can make sure that you've worked the "bugs" out and that all is running smoothly.