

Starting and Running a Business in Grand Rapids

1. Overview

Are you excited to start your own business? You have a lot to think about, so we want to help you get started in the right direction. This guide is here to help you do just that.

Before you open for business, you'll have certain requirements and paperwork to complete. Most businesses need a license from the City, County or State. We'll get more in-depth on that under the Licenses and Permits section of this guide. Is your business still a concept? We also have information on local resources to help make your dream a reality.

Keep in mind that while we've included important information and resources in this guide, we may not have addressed the requirements for each situation. You're responsible for meeting all local, state, or federal requirements for your business. Any time you have a question, contact your local, state or federal agencies to ensure you haven't missed a step.

Let's get down to business! Click Next to get started.

Would you prefer to have a piece of paper that covers the basics of this guide? We also have a [checklist](#) you can print.

2. Business Resources

Have you asked yourself if there is someone out there who can help you get started or grow your business? If you're looking for answers, we can help. Check out these great resources available in our City:

[Startup Space](#)

Our community has created a virtual platform for you to find all the resources you need on your entrepreneurial journey. When you create an account in Startup Space, you will have access not only to resources and events, but you will also be able to connect with others that are on the same journey as you.

Once you create an account and login, you can search for resources all around West Michigan (and beyond!) by the industry you are in, the service you need, your stage of company and geographic location. You'll be able to see a description of the service provider and all the ways you can contact them.

[Create an account](#) and become part of the Startup Space today.

City of Grand Rapids

OFFICE OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The City of Grand Rapids has an Equal Business Opportunity Program that enhances the competitiveness of our small local suppliers in the following areas:

1. Professional Services
2. Goods and Services
3. Construction

MICRO LOCAL BUSINESS ENTERPRISE (MLBE)

We offer a variety of **Bid Discounts** for businesses looking to do business with the City. One in particular is our Micro Local Business Enterprise (MLBE) Certification, this FREE certification helps increase the competitiveness of small local companies when bidding on public projects as a prime or subcontractor. To learn more about our MLBE Program, please contact our Office of Diversity and Inclusion for details.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Office of Diversity and Inclusion

businessopportunities@grcity.us

616-456-3027

Michigan Small Business Development Center

The MI-SBDC is a non-profit organization funded by the U.S. Small Business Administration. They provide services such as low-cost training, one-on-one counseling, and market research.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

sbdc@gvsu.edu

616-331-7370

Grand Rapids Opportunities for Women (GROW)

GROW is an SBA funded, non-profit business center. They provide training and ongoing counseling for their clients. GROW also offers a microloan program for qualified individuals seeking a loan.

Here's their mission: Grand Rapids Opportunities for Women (GROW) is a service focused on women at various stages of business ownership. We are the entrepreneurial resource to help women take the next step, empowering and supporting them with professional expertise for a lifetime.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

info@growbusiness.org

616-458-3404

SCORE

Looking for advice from someone who's been in your shoes? SCORE is a group of volunteers made up of active and retired business owners and executives. This non-profit organization offers free mentoring, business counseling and low-cost workshops. SCORE volunteers use their real-life business experience to help your business thrive.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

616-771-0305

Grand Rapids Public Library

Yes, the Library. The Library provides access to a variety of business information and resources, both on-site and via the internet. Dust off that library card, and use it to search online from any one of the Library's eight locations.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Small Business Resource Center

[Visit Website](#)

businesslibrarian@grpl.org

616-988-5400

Start Garden

Start Garden is a resource for Entrepreneurs starting with new ideas, start-ups, and existing small businesses. From local entrepreneur support to 5x5 Business Pitch Night to Venture Capital investment opportunities and more, this organization can offer support in many ways. Start Garden also offers low cost co-working space at their location in downtown Grand Rapids.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

Michigan Economic Development Corp

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) works to attract new businesses and keep existing businesses in Michigan. They'll help your business with site location, financing, and employee recruiting and training. They also provide other resources and services.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

MEDCservices@michigan.org

888-522-0103

Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce

This group serves as a support organization for local businesses in Grand Rapids. The Grand Rapids Area Chamber offers business services, advocacy and public policy, and talent development programming.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

616-771-0300

West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

The West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to working with all members of the community to increase the economic advancement of Hispanic owned business and to assist the professional growth of Hispanic business leaders in West Michigan.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

616-452-3960

Grand Rapids Area Black Businesses (GRABB)

Grand Rapids Area Black Businesses (GRABB) is a vehicle for economic development and empowerment in the Grand Rapids area. GRABB offers a black business directory, advocates for local businesses, and creates awareness to help businesses grow and become economically sustainable.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

The Downtown Market Incubator Kitchen

Building on Grand Rapids' growing local food movement, the Downtown Market Incubator Kitchen strives to foster entrepreneurship, good food, and community while embracing triple bottom line values. Affordable kitchen rates and practical business tools give budding entrepreneurs a leg up in starting a food business.

[Visit Website](#)

info@downtownmarketgr.com

616-805-5308

The Starting Block

The Starting Block is a home for individuals who want to take a special recipe to market or create a food or natural resource business. They provide entrepreneurs, producers, and processors properly equipped, licensed, and inspected food processing kitchens. The Starting Block gives aspiring businesses reasonable rentals without the initial investment in costly facilities and equipment.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

231-873-1432

The Right Place

The Right Place has assisted thousands of West Michigan companies to invest more than \$5 billion and 45,800 new jobs throughout the region. The Right Place offers confidential, comprehensive business services. They meet with current and prospective companies, connecting them to the resources they need to grow in Grand Rapids.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

616-771-0325

Grand Rapids Inventors Network (GRIN)

The Grand Rapids Inventors Network is a regional non-profit organization that helps its members advance their creative ideas. It's also a place where inventors, marketers, and creative people can learn and network. GRIN helps inventors help themselves through networking and

experience-sharing with other inventors. The organization encourages and nurtures the new inventor towards professional growth and product realization.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

Spring GR

SpringGR is a grassroots business training experience that uses the **Business Model Canvas**([PDF](#)) (think of it like a road map for starting a business). They help entrepreneurs develop their idea or business. Over the course of 12 weeks, SpringGR brings people together in small groups, teaches the business process, and provides coaching. Over the past six years, Spring GR has helped to launch over 300 businesses and create more than 400 jobs.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

3. Financial Assistance and Incentives

Economic Development

The City Economic Development Office can help your business with site development, expansion and location within the City. They provide information and assistance with tax abatements, site selection, Neighborhood Enterprise Zones, and redevelopment of neglected properties.

Economic Development also serves as your liaison with the SmartZone, Brownfield Redevelopment Authority and the Economic Development Corporation. If you are thinking of making investment in a building or on vacant land, you should contact the Economic Development office early on.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

econdevshrd@grcity.us

616-456-3431

Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc.

Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc. (DGRI) is an agency responsible for many improvements in the downtown area. DGRI promotes economic growth and encourages historic preservation within

the central business district. They offer incentives for building reuse, areaway (the part of the basement extending under the sidewalk) fill expenses, and streetscape improvements.

Take a look at the ways they can support your business [here](#).

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

616-719-4610

Michigan Economic Development Corporation

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) markets Michigan as the place to do business, assists businesses in their growth strategies, and fosters the growth of vibrant communities across the state – including Grand Rapids! Click [here](#) to see the ways they can assist, organized by services and core industries. is to attract new businesses and keep existing businesses in Michigan. To accomplish this, they will help your business with site location, financing, employee recruiting and training, along with other resources and services.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

MEDCservices@michigan.org

888-522-0103

Economic Development Foundation

The Economic Development Foundation (EDF) is a Michigan non-profit organization. They're licensed to administer the Small Business Administration (SBA) 504 Loan Program. All 504 loans will also involve a lending institution, such as a bank. 504 loans give small businesses access capital at low, fixed interest rates with a 20 year term, and with only 10% down. You can use this type of loan to buy land or an existing building, or construct a building.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

616-459-4825

Michigan Good Food Fund

Michigan Good Food Fund is a \$30 million public-private partnership. This loan fund provides financing to good food enterprises who are working to increase access to affordable, healthy food in low-income and underserved communities in Michigan. This includes the range of

businesses that grow, process, distribute, and sell healthy food that reaches those who need it most.

They provide flexible, patient [financial assistance](#) to good food enterprises often overlooked by traditional banks. Their lending is bolstered by [business assistance](#) to help entrepreneurs grow their ventures and prepare for financing.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

313-300-0104

Start Garden

Start Garden is a resource for Entrepreneurs starting with new ideas, start-ups, and existing small businesses. From local entrepreneur support to 5x5 Business Pitch Night to Venture Capital investment opportunities and more, this organization can offer support in many ways.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

Community Development Financial Institutions

Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) provide access to affordable financial products and services that is critical for economically vibrant communities. CDFIs are often better alternatives to costly payday lenders, credit cards and check-cashing outlets. A lot of small businesses and critical community development projects lack access to the capital investment they need to spark economic growth in their communities. CDFIs works to address these issues by investing federal resources often matched with private funding. Many CDFI's work to serve low-income and underserved people and communities.

The CDFI Program offers both Financial Assistance and Technical Assistance borrowers, which support and enhance these organizations' ability to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Rende Progress Capital](#)
contact@rendeprogresscapital.com

[Opportunity Resource Fund](#)
616-222-1197
tpetersen@oppfund.org

[Grand Rapids Opportunities for Women](#)

616-458-3404

info@growbusiness.org

[Northern Initiatives](#)

906-228-5571

info@northerninitiatives.org

[Capital Impact Partners](#)

313-230-1199

npohl@capitalimpact.org

KIVA

Kiva is an international nonprofit founded in 2005 and based in San Francisco. They work to connect people through lending to alleviate poverty. Kiva celebrates and supports people looking to create a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

4. Location and Zoning

Location, Location, Location

Choosing the right location for your business can be a challenge. You have a lot of things to consider: What's the market size? Where's my competition located? What's the condition of the building I want to lease or buy? Could I afford to renovate or build new?

Taking advantage of the resources available to help you with this important decision can improve your chance for success. For help finding a location for your business, check out these great resources:

- [Downtown Retail Opportunities](#)
- [Economic Development](#)
- [The Right Place](#)

Zoning

The City has categories for property use such as residential, commercial, industrial, and a few others. To give you an idea, take a look at this [zoning overview map](#) of the City. Operating your business in your desired location involves meeting the zoning requirements and verifying the

legal use of the property. In certain cases, you may need special approval or a hearing with the Board of Zoning Appeals. There are also instances of non-conforming or "grandfathered" property uses, which is why the City recommends ordering a Property Use Verification (PUV). [Click here to complete the online Property Use Verification form.](#)

FULL ZONING ORDINANCE

[Zoning Ordinance\(PDF, 5MB\)](#)

CONTACT INFORMATION

City Planning Department

planning@grcity.us

616-456-4100

5. Licenses, Permits and Code Compliance

City Business Licenses

Are you trying to find out if you need a license from the City? The best place to get that answer is the City Clerk's Office. They issue business licenses under the relevant provisions of the City Code for the purpose of preserving public health, safety, or welfare.

APPLY ONLINE

[Apply for a Business License](#)

CONTACT INFORMATION

Office of the City Clerk

grbusinesslic@grcity.us

616-456-3017

County Licenses and Registrations

You'll need to register your business with the Kent County Clerk's Office. You can search to see if the business name you want to use is available, as well as find the forms you need on the [Kent County Business Lookup](#).

FOOD SERVICE

All food service establishments and temporary food vendors need a license from the Kent County Health Department. Visit the [Food Safety Services](#) website for more info.

CONTACT INFORMATION

General Licensing

[Visit Website](#)

616-632-7640

Food Service Licensing

[Visit Website](#)

616-632-7100

State Licenses and Permits

The State has two great ways for you to search which license or permit you'll be required to have, if any:

- [State License Search](#)
- [Michigan Business One Stop](#)

Construction Permits

Depending on the site work, you'll need to have one or more permit(s) from the City. Site work includes modification to any structure (including a single wall), or to an electrical, HVAC, or plumbing system. Most of this work needs to be performed by a licensed contractor. We also recommend using a professional designer (architect or engineer) for your project. Special requirements apply in historic districts. There guides on our website for Commercial project development as well as demolition permit options for companies.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Development Center

[Visit Website](#)

devcenter@grcity.us

616-456-4100

Fire Department Permits

Certain types of businesses need a Fire Department Operational Permit. You'll need one of these if you plan to open a restaurant, bar, or night club. Also, many industrial processing activities, and businesses involving the processing, handling, or storage of hazardous materials will need

this permit. Check out the [Occupational Permit Guide](#) to find out if you need this permit. To find the application and learn more, head over to our [Fire Department Permits](#) page.

Separate permits are also required for:

SPECIAL EVENTS

- [Apply for a Special Event Permit](#)
- [Learn about Open Flame/Candle Requirements](#)

FIREWORKS

You'll need to complete these applications:

- [Pyrotechnic Special Effects Application\(PDF, 29KB\)](#)
- [Fire Department Operational Permit\(PDF, 44KB\)](#)
- [Fireworks Display Permit Application\(PDF, 38KB\)](#)

Additionally, all businesses need to complete the [Grand Rapids Fire Department Bulletin-9 Chemical Survey](#).

Sign Installation

If you plan to have a sign or banner placed in the City, even temporarily, you'll need a Sign Permit. You'll also need this permit if you intend to have an awning that functions as a sign. The regulations for signs are part of the [City Zoning Ordinance](#).

APPLY ONLINE

[Apply for a Sign Permit](#)

CONTACT INFORMATION

Development Center

[Visit Website](#)

devcenter@grcity.us

616-456-4100

Use of City Owned Property

If you want to occupy the public right-of-way for construction-related purposes, you'll need a Temporary Occupancy Permit. Examples of this would be scaffolding, or placement of a dumpster or equipment.

If you have plans for on-going use of the public right-of-way, you will need an Encroachment Permit. Awnings, overhanging building features, and sidewalk seating are examples of on-going use.

APPLY ONLINE

- [Apply for a Temporary Occupancy Permit](#)
- [Apply for an Encroachment Permit](#)

CONTACT INFORMATION

Development Center

[Visit Website](#)

devcenter@grcity.us

616-456-4100

Code Compliance

The structure where you operate your business will need to meet code requirements for use and occupancy. This includes the electrical, HVAC, and plumbing systems. The structure will also need meet the requirements of the International Fire Code, as adopted by the City.

If you want to change the use of a structure, the City requires a Change of Use permit to verify compliance. Additionally, you need to report any changes of use to the Fire Department. If you need help or have questions, you can contact the Development Center by calling (616) 456-4100

- [Fire Department Requirements](#)
- [Change of Use Application](#)
- [Online Inspection Services](#)

CONTACT INFORMATION

Development Center

[Visit Website](#)

devcenter@grcity.us

616-456-4000

6. Utilities and Services

Once you've found the perfect place to set up shop, you'll need to keep the lights on. These are the utility companies you'll want to contact:

Electric

Consumers Energy is the local electric utility

[Start Service Online](#)

CONTACT INFORMATION

800-805-0490

Gas

DTE Energy is the local natural gas utility.

[Start Service Online](#)

CONTACT INFORMATION

800-477-4747

City of Grand Rapids Water and Sewer Services

Grand Rapids Water System Customer Service staff members are available to answer your questions regarding opening and closing accounts, billing and payment options, meter reading and leaks, and other water related issues.

[Start Water Service Online](#)

CONTACT INFORMATION

Water System

[Visit Website](#)

water@grcity.us

616-456-3000

Trash and Recycling

The City offers Pay As You Throw refuse service and free recycling within City limits.

[Request Trash and Recycling Service Online](#)

CONTACT INFORMATION

Public Services Department

[Visit Website](#)

publicworks@grand-rapids.mi.us

616-456-3000

7. Taxes and Fees

The taxes you will pay as a business owner can vary based on what type of business entity you have.

You can choose to have a Sole Proprietorship, a Limited Liability Company (LLC), a General Partnership, a Corporation, along with other options. It's best to consult an attorney for help choosing what's right for you. Here you can find what types of taxes you could be paying.

Are you a small business? [Click here to apply for a small business property tax exemption.](#)

Property Taxes

REAL PROPERTY

Every year, the City Assessor calculates a tax assessment of your property. The Assessor's Office mails an Assessment Notice to the owner of the property in late January. The Notice shows the current and prior year's taxable value, and also explains the appeal process. You'll want to make sure the Assessor's Office has your current mailing address so you get your Notice on time. Keep in mind, if you lease your space, you may pay these taxes directly to the City, or to your Landlord as part of your lease agreement.

PERSONAL PROPERTY

You may have already been familiar with Real Property tax, but you will also have Personal Property taxes as a business owner. Personal Property Assessments are based on the value of equipment and other assets you own. Every year in January, the Assessor's office mails a reminder to file your [Personal Property Statement](#). [State Law](#) requires you to file your Personal Property Statement no later than February 20th each year. In March, the Assessor's Office mails the Assessment Notice letting you know the amount you'll pay tax on. If you don't file your Statement, the City will estimate the value of your personal property.

CONTACT INFORMATION

311 or (616) 456-3000

ONLINE RESOURCES

- [Look up the real property tax amounts for your property](#)
- [Estimate Your Real Property Taxes](#)
- [Get Help Filling out Your Personal Property Statement\(PDF, 150KB\)](#)
- [E-file your Personal Property Statement](#)
- [Update your mailing address](#)

City Income Taxes

Is your business address located within City limits? Do you sell goods or services within City limits? If you answered yes to one or both of these questions, you will need to pay City Income tax.

Next question, do you have employees? If you do, you will have to withhold City income tax from their paycheck.

INCOME TAX FORMS

[Find Tax Forms Online](#)

Sales and Use Tax

As a business or an individual, if you sell tangible personal property you will need a sales tax license from the State. You should review the [State's rules for sales and use tax](#).

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

517-373-3200

State of Michigan Taxes

State business tax information is available on the Michigan Department of Treasury.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

517-373-3200

Federal Taxes

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) oversees federal tax collection.

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Visit Website](#)

800-829-1040

8. Conclusion

Congratulations on starting your business! We hope you find success in your new venture. As things come up throughout your operations, keep in mind that we're here to help!

Call to speak with one of our helpful customer service representatives Monday through Friday, 8 AM to 5 PM, by dialing 311 or 616-456-3000.