**MORE “BIG IDEAS**

**FOR SMALL BUSINESS”**



by

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**MORE “BIG IDEAS FOR SMALL BUSINESS”[[1]](#footnote-1)**

The National League of Cities and the Center for City Solutions and Applied Research recently issued a thoughtful report ***Big Ideas for Small Business***. Although all of the proffered suggestions to help small businesses are smart ones, I’d add the following action items to every government’s agenda.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**I. Refine Your Government’s Approach to the Small Business Community**

**A. Recognize the Diversity of the Small Business Community**

Most business assistance programs divide entities by the number of employees, annual revenue, or life stage and no further. Based on my experience, other categories may be equally, if not more, meaningful, especially for small business assistance programming. For my continuity planning service, I identified ten different segments of the small business community, each with unique attributes and needs:

* Artists, composers, craftsmen, musicians, photographers, songwriters, and writers;
* Catering companies, event planners, restaurants, and others who provide goods and services at set times per advance reservations;
* Factories that build products;
* Farmers, ranchers, and other producers of agricultural commodities (e.g., plants and trees);
* Professionals who deliver their services either on an “as needed” or a regular basis (e.g., lawyers or technical writers);
* Rental property owners/managers;
* Repairmen, based either in a mobile shop or at set location, who work on an “as needed” basis (e.g., automobile glass replacement teams and geeks);
* Retail stores (e.g., craft stores and florist shops);
* Service providers who operate from a set location on a scheduled basis and with a fairly set clientele (e.g., hairdressers); and
* Service providers who work at the customer’s home or place of business, either on an “as needed” or regularly scheduled basis (e.g., dog sitters or tree trimmers).

Beyond this initial categorization, other useful elements for matching businesses with the appropriate resources could include:

* Does the venture involve the opening of a franchise, the purchase of an ongoing business, an additional location for an existing company, or the launching of a brand new product/service?
* What degree of business experience does the entrepreneur/owner possesses (i.e., none, some, or extensive)?

The importance of focusing on the diversity of the small business community hit home with me when I sought advice from the local SCORE program. The business mentor they matched me with was a retired accounting professional. Although he excelled in his field, he couldn’t offer me the advice that I needed, which was marketing help for a combination publication series and consulting practice.

**B. Recognize the Diversity of the Knowledge Base of Entrepreneurs and Small Business Owners and Craft Reference Materials Accordingly**

Anyone and everyone can catch the entrepreneurial fever. As a result, entrepreneurs may have a wide range of experience and training in operating a for-profit business. Although some may be highly skilled serial entrepreneurs, many people attempting to start new enterprises, like me, may have no business experience to draw upon. Simplified, step-by-step instructions for all relevant tasks in business startup and operation, keyed to a wide variety of backgrounds, therefore, are imperative.

Of particular benefit to those on the low-experience level, the Boston Business Hub has created a Licensing and Permitting Wizard that walks all business owners/managers through the process via a series of structured questions, such as:[[3]](#footnote-3)

* Do you have a business plan?
* Do you have a location?
* Have you registered your business?
* Do you have a Federal Tax Identification Number?
* Do you know what the zoning code does and does not allow you to do with your space?

Tucson, Arizona’s Small Business Commission has made available to businesses within that community a graphic that illustrates the City’s 17 Step Business License Process.[[4]](#footnote-4) That document guides businesses through the licensing process as follows:

Step 1 – Will your business be located within the city limits of Tucson? Will you conduct business within the city limits?

Step 2 – Do you know if your business is zoned to conduct your type of business in your part of town? Do you know if the property/space you are about to rent will pass building and fire code requirements? Do you have a Certificate of Occupancy for your business name?

Step 3 – Will you be using a sign to advertise your business? Will any building construction or tenant improvement be required for your business?

Step 4 – Will your business operate out of your home?

Step 5 – Will your business sell or serve liquor?

Step 6 – Will food preparation be involved?

Step 7 – Will you be a manufacturer?

Step 8 – Will you manufacture, use, or store hazardous materials, including fireworks?

Step 9 – Are you a general (prime) contractor of subcontractor?

Step 10 – Will your business be a Corporation or a Limited Liability Company? Is your business registered in another state?

Step 11 – Will you need to protect your trade name or “doing business as” name?

Step 12 – Will you be using personal property for business purposes that has a value in excess of $60,000?

Step 13 – Will you be using your own or someone else’s vehicle(s) to transport people or products for a fee? Will you be allowing other people to use your vehicle(s) on a fee-for-hire basis? Will your business involve retailing, wholesaling, auctioning, brokering, manufacturing/distributing, or transporting autos or recycling vehicle parts? Will your business be an automobile title business?

Step 14 – Will you have one or more employees other than yourself?

Step 15 – Do you need Federal Internal Revenue Service forms or other tax information?

Step 16 – Will you need State of Arizona sales tax information, including information on use tax, withholding tax, or wholesale tobacco tax information?

Step 17 – Will you need a City of Tucson Business Privilege License or Service License?

**C. Make Resources Available Outside Normal Business Hours Whenever Possible**

Aspiring and current business owners and operators are typically working during normal business hours (either at their business or outside employment) when government agencies and university-based assistance programs are open. It’s imperative, therefore, that all relevant materials (including every licensing, permit, and registration form and comprehensive instructions for their completion and filing) be available online 24/7. Furthermore, in-person assistance must be available at nights and on weekends.

**D. Subsidize Memberships in Chambers of Commerce and Participation in Business Networking Activities**

In an effort to launch my continuity planning business, I knew that Chambers of Commerce could be a key asset in that effort. When I approached local Chambers about being a speaker at one of their meetings on the importance of continuity planning for small businesses, however, I was universally told that wasn't possible unless I was a Chamber member.

If a person is struggling to start a business on a shoe string budget, that's a huge financial hurdle given that Chamber memberships may cost $100+. That doesn't include the costs of attending individual networking events. Consider too that in major metro areas there isn't just one Chamber of Commerce.  In the San Antonio metro area, for example, there are 16:

Alamo City Chamber of Commerce

Alamo Asian American Chamber of Commerce

Alamo Heights Chamber of Commerce

Christian Business Chamber of Commerce

Greater Boerne Chamber of Commerce

Greater San Antonio Chinese Chamber of Commerce

Leon Valley Chamber of Commerce

North San Antonio Chamber of Commerce

Randolph Metrocom Chamber of Commerce

San Antonio Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Chamber of Commerce

San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

San Antonio Women's Chamber of Commerce

Schertz Chamber of Commerce

South San Antonio Chamber of Commerce

The Holistic Chamber of Commerce

West San Antonio Chamber of Commerce

Governments that want to encourage small business owners to tap their local Chambers for assistance might explore subsidizing Chamber memberships (e.g., for a three to six month period).

**E. Create a Local Shark Tank Program**

Budding entrepreneurs love the ABC television show **Shark Tank**. We learn so much from the pitches and the responses thereto. Most communities could have their own version of **Shark Tank** with experienced business executives and investors vetting potential new businesses/products and services (while others watch and learn). If carried live on local government cable channels and archived for future reference, these sessions would be an invaluable supplement to business assistance services already available within the community.

At times, what an aspiring entrepreneur needs is the harsh assessment that his/her product or service idea is a bad one and not worth pursuing.  Sometimes it's the offer of operating capital or a business partnership. Other times it could be in-kind services (e.g., marketing support). Almost always entrepreneurs and small business owners would relish the opportunity to connect with a mentor who will provide guidance (e.g., on refining a sales pitch) or a pep talk when the going gets tough. The participating sharks could offer all this and more to local entrepreneurs and small business owners/managers. [[5]](#footnote-5)

Jason Wiens, lead policy engagement manager for the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation’s entrepreneur’s program, highlights the merits of such an approach:

States typically encourage more entrepreneurship … through infrastructure and investments. While those policies may be helpful, research is beginning to show those are not the most efficient ways to encourage a state’s entrepreneurs to experiment with new businesses.

‘With these approaches, government tries to reach entrepreneurs through things like business incubators or establishing a public venture fund,’ Wiens said. ‘ … ‘Entrepreneurs, we’ve found, learn by interacting with other entrepreneurs. We believe policymakers … should think, ‘How do we, our programs and our support, make sure entrepreneurs are connected to one another?’ These connections provide an opportunity for mentorship and entrepreneurial growth.’[[6]](#footnote-6)

**F. Provide Copyright, Patent, and Trademark Protection Assistance**

The roll-out of my continuity planning business has stalled because I realized that once I start distributing my exhaustive set of guidebooks, I wouldn’t have the resources to enforce my copyright. Thus, my forward movement is halted while I search for a business partner who can provide that pivotal support. I’m certain my story isn’t unique. Put the legal clout of government behind start-ups (at least initially) on copyright, patent, and trademark issues and the chances of success for many enterprises like mine may increase measurably.

Policymakers should be mindful too of the challenges that entrepreneurs face if they live in rural or small communities. Those individuals may be hundreds of miles away from attorneys with expertise in copyright, patent, and trademark issues. Thought should be given, therefore, on how to connect those aspiring business builders with the technical expertise they need to protect their new enterprise.

**G. Focus on the Survivability of the Business as Well as Its Establishment and Growth**

As governments help businesses plan for success, it’s only prudent that they help them guard against unnecessary failures. Continuity planning, therefore, should be a core requirement for any company seeking government aid and a key component of any educational programming. That assistance may be critical to the survival of the enterprise in case of a fire, flood, hurricane, tornado, or other natural disaster.

It may be critical to the recovery of the community too in the event of similar events. Small businesses, in particular, provide core goods and services (e.g., groceries and hardware) and jobs essential to the normal economic life of the community. If they can’t recover and do it quickly after a natural disaster, the whole community suffers.

**II. Cooperate on an Intragovernmental and Intergovernmental Basis to Benefit the Small Business Community**

**A. Cut the Duplicative Paperwork Burden by Automating and Redesigning the Business Licensing, Permitting, and Registration Process on a Government-wide Basis[[7]](#footnote-7)**

One of my greatest frustrations in dealing with governments is the incredible amount of duplicative paperwork and lack of automation in most information gathering activities. My first consulting client deleted a comma from their name, a change which required amending their business registrations with several dozen states. I did all of that paperwork (which was indeed paperwork at that time), an experience which is forever seared into my mind.

When I was doing an extensive amount of proposal writing for clients, once again I was frustrated by the incredible amount of duplicative paperwork from application to application. To speed my work, I put together the list of commonly (and not so commonly) asked questions in Requests for Proposals from state and local governments (see Appendix) so I could gather this information quickly from new clients. To this day, I wonder how much of the information provided played any role in the government’s decision regarding the bid award.

Over the years, it seems little has changed. Log onto the web pages for many state and local government agencies today and you’ll see many (most) licensing, permitting, and registration activities still tied to a paper based system. Furthermore, within governments there’s little coordination on data gathering activities, thus not only being wasteful of the business owner/manager’s time but government resources as well.

Governments can put money into the pockets of all business owners (but especially small business owners and start-ups) simply by putting more time back into their day. A new workflow savvy strategy for licensing, permitting, and registration applications, therefore, needs to be devised.

**1. Establish a Standard Business Profile**

Governments should identify the core elements of a business profile that would be the foundation of any licensing, permitting, or registration process.[[8]](#footnote-8) A quick glance at a wide variety of business licensing, permitting, or registration applications (including vendor registration systems) reveals that they typically ask for some combination of the following information:

* + Company Name (including the “doing business as” or fictitious name)
	+ Company Description (e.g., key words or a sentence or two)
	+ Company Business Type (e.g. hospitality, restaurant, or retail)
	+ Company Mailing Address
	+ Company Physical Address
	+ Company Telephone Number
	+ Company Email Address
	+ Company Internet Home Page Address
	+ Company Facsimile Number
	+ Company Identification Number – DUNS
	+ Company Identification Number – Tax
	+ Company Citizenship Status
	+ Company Legal Structure (e.g., LLC or corporation)
	+ Company State of Incorporation
	+ Company Date of Incorporation
	+ Company Preferred Method of Contact
	+ Company Tax Status (e.g., backup withholding required)
	+ Company Payment Terms
	+ Company Freight Terms
	+ Company Shipping Method
	+ Company Shipping Terms
	+ Company Counties Served (i.e., business territory)[[9]](#footnote-9)
	+ Company Time Zone
	+ Company Type – Minority Owned Business[[10]](#footnote-10)
	+ Company Type – Small Business
	+ Company Type – Woman Owned Business
	+ Company Type – Veteran Owned Business
	+ Company NIGP Class/Code
	+ Company Manager/Owner Name
	+ Company Manager/Owner Title
	+ Company Manager/Owner Email Address
	+ Company Manager/Owner Telephone Number
	+ Company Owners/Partners Percentage Interest Owned
	+ Company Agent for Service Name
	+ Company Agent for Service Title
	+ Company Agent for Service Address
	+ Company Agent for Service Telephone Number
	+ Company Director/Officer/Stockholder Name
	+ Company Director/Officer/Stockholder Title
	+ Company Director/Officer/Stockholder Address
	+ Company Director/Officer/Stockholder Telephone Number

Working from this basic list, all relevant state statutes and local ordinances should be reviewed to determine if any licensing, permitting, or registration program requires the submission of information not listed above. [[11]](#footnote-11)

Governments then should inventory all the data requested by the current licensing, permitting, and registration forms to see if there are any data elements that appear in the forms that are not on the above list (especially the information that might be gathered on behalf of other government agencies, such as an inquiry about hazardous materials on the premises for the benefit of the fire department). If there are, the appropriate department should be contacted for an explanation of why that piece of information must be collected as part of the licensing, permitting, and registration process. If it passes the “must have” test, that element should be added to the core list.

Using this standardized profile, governments should build a centralized, electronic business information database from which individual licensing, permitting, and registration programs draw their data.

To see the possibilities, examine the national employment platform Governmentjobs.com. Job applicants simply create a basic profile in the Governmentjobs.com system as would businesses in this aforementioned system. When they find a position that they would like to apply for with any of the thousands of participating governments, they simply click on the Apply button. (The business would check the type of application or registration they must file.) The system automatically pre-populates the online job application with information from the profile. Applicants check the “pre=populated” data to ensure that it is still current (updating it if not) and then proceed with completion of the application.

To the extent that the government desires additional information not included in the basic profile, Governmentjobs.com allows that customization. Applicants simply respond to supplemental questions and/or provide the desired documents. Using the GovernmentJobs.com system, therefore, the time needed to apply for a typical job drops from 20 – 45 minutes to approximately 5 minutes (and errors in data entry are avoided). I love it!

**2. Provide Value Added for the Business Community**

Automation and centralization of the business licensing, permitting, and registration system could pay multiple benefits. Information collected could be used to create an online directory of local businesses, which should be made readily accessible to the public so that they can “shop local.” Businesses could benefit too if the system is designed to provide automatic renewal notices for licenses, permits, registrations, and tax filings and notification of bidding opportunities.

Alerts (either by email or text) could be sent to announce road closures near businesses or to share crime alerts and emergency preparedness information. Looking across a government’s scope of activities, many other beneficial features could be identified easily.

**3. Enhance the Overall Operating Efficiency of the Jurisdiction’s Information Technology System**

A secondary benefit of going to an all electronic system as described above will be to the internal operations of the government itself. Many across the United States are now struggling with decades old legacy computer systems that are near or far beyond their useful life. Bill Kehoe, CIO of King County, Washington told *Governing* magazine:

After years of building special-purpose applications in silos, governments may find themselves managing portfolios crammed with redundant systems that can’t share data or integrate business functions…. Because they’re difficult or even impossible to modify, old applications force governments to stick with outmoded procedures, and legacy applications also take a heavy financial toll. “The support cost to maintain all these applications is eating up probably 43 to 54 percent of our total IT operations budget.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

Pete Anderson, Chief Information Officer for the City of Fort Worth, recently shifted his city to a Windows environment, replacing a variety of programs with an enterprise resource planning suite. He described the benefits:

Modernization provides a change to update existing business processes. “We don’t need to automate exactly what they’ve been doing,” he said. “We might be able to use automation to do something even better.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

Sonny Hashmi, Acting Chief Information Officer for the General Services Administration (GSA), highlighted the significant financial savings attainable from consolidation of applications as envisioned here. “You’re using common business process templates, common workflow templates, common data entry forms and authentication… All of those things are done once and well, rather than doing them for each application.” According to Hashmi, using that strategy reduced the total life cycle cost per application for GSA by more than 90 percent.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Usability should be enhanced as well. The information technology staff for Lincoln – Lancaster County (Nebraska) is redesigning its online presence “so we could start presenting things in common ways.” Terry Lowe, Systems Coordinator explained, “(A)ll of the government’s applications (have) a similar look and feel.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Such changes enhance usability for all parties, but particularly for the business community and members of the public.

**B. Further Cut the Duplicative Paperwork Burden by Coordinating and/or Consolidating the Licensing, Permitting, and Registration Process on a Regional, Statewide, and/or National Basis**

Not all small businesses have only one static location. Even those that do may have a customer base or service area that spans more than one city, county, metropolitan region, or state. Furthermore, anyone who is wants to do business with governments may have dozens of different federal/state/regional/local government agencies, special districts, school districts, and public colleges and universities as potential customers within their service area. Businesses in Illinois, for example, have 2,824 cities, counties, and townships within the state as potential business customers. Depending on their scope of business operations, those nearly 3,000 jurisdictions might have regulatory authority over some of their business operations. Imagine the paperwork burden involved.

Consolidation of licensing, permitting, and registration activities on an intergovernmental basis thus should be fully explored. Governments are consolidating increasingly in the procurement and taxation fields and reaping the benefits, both for themselves and the public. Nearly 500 community colleges and school districts in Michigan, for example, participate in a consolidated procurement system.[[16]](#footnote-16) That drive to consolidate and standardize should be expanded across the full range of government activities (especially those affecting business enterprises).

For an excellent model of what can be achieved by a consolidated statewide system (this one for court records), see the Florida Courts E-filing Portal that serves all Florida counties.[[17]](#footnote-17)

**C. Coordinate Information Resources**

Intergovernmental cooperation is imperative in the information resources area as well. To enhance assistance to the business community, public libraries should be linked with federal, state, local, and university business assistance centers to provide seamless information and technical support. Non-profit and private sector information providers (e.g., Chambers of Commerce) should be invited to participate as well in this information coordination/sharing initiative.

With the vast majority of information sources online now, every community would be better served if staff for these federal/state/local entities sat down together, looked at the information resources they have, consulted with the business community to assess their unmet resource needs, cut the duplication and poorer quality items, created a standardized list of references, pooled their subscription dollars to get the most bang for the buck, trained all staff on usage of those materials, and then made them available through an integrated portal.

Individuals staffing these centers should meet periodically to exchange information, assess trends in public inquiries and expressed resource needs, refine the collection of materials and staffing schedules, and develop materials for joint use as circumstances warrant (e.g., a piece integrating federal/state/local tax filing guidance). For insight into how such a consolidation and coordination effort could work, examine the operations of the Animal Shelter Alliance of Portland, Oregon.[[18]](#footnote-18)

**III. Facilitate Accurate Assessment of the Impact of Assistance Programs**

Being a skilled policy analyst as well as an entrepreneur, I would be remiss if I didn’t remind readers that government resources aren’t limitless. To ensure that assistance programs produce the maximum return on investment and meet the needs of all segments of the business community, a comprehensive set of metrics must be in place.

**1. Learn About the Business Owner or Entrepreneur**

To judge the effectiveness of assistance programs and their reach throughout the business community, governments should ask assistance seekers[[19]](#footnote-19) and new licensees, permit recipients, and registrants to provide some background information about themselves. At a minimum, that should include:

* Their business background (rating it on a 0 to 5 scale with 0 being no experience in operating/owning a business and 5 being extensive experience in operating/owning a business),
* The private sector entities that they have sought assistance from in the last six months (e.g., banks, the Chamber of Commerce, professional associations, or venture capitalists), and
* The public sector entities that they have sought assistance from in the last six months (e.g., US Small Business Administration, state agencies).

The focus of a request for information should be logged as well with information seekers being asked to indicate the subject of their inquiry (marking all that apply):

* Business plans
* Customer service
* e-Commerce
* Financial assistance (distinguishing between bank loans, crowdsourcing, government loans, venture capital, and other options)
* Financial management
* Franchises (buying or establishing)
* General business management (not otherwise listed)
* Government procurement (distinguishing between federal, state, and local)
* Green business/sustainability
* Home-based business issues
* Information technology tools for businesses
* Intellectual property (copyright, patent)
* Legal issues
* Marketing (distinguishing by type, including advertising, branding, social media, trademarks, and website)
* Minority/women owned issues (distinguishing among them)
* Personnel management
* Risk management (including continuity planning, insurance, and security)
* Sales (including pricing strategies)
* Startup (e.g., fictitious name selection and legal structure)
* Tax compliance (distinguishing between federal, state, and local)
* Veteran owned business issues
* Zoning

**2. Learn About Their Business Venture**

Applicants for assistance, licenses, permits, or registrations should be asked a number of baseline questions about their business venture in addition to those contained in the business profile. It would be useful to know, for example, if the business activity involves (marking all that apply):

* Opening of a franchise,
* The purchase of an existing business,
* The opening of an additional location for an existing business,
* The addition of mobile capacity for an existing business,
* The establishment of a home-based business,
* The establishment of a mobile business,
* The transition of a home-based business to one with an office/storefront,
* The launching of a new product, and
* The launching of a new service.

**IV. Final Thoughts**

Ask any business owner and manager today who their competition is. Most won’t mention the company across the street or across the state. Many may mention instead companies on the other side of the globe. Intergovernmental cooperation and coordination, therefore, are now more important than ever before. As always, our true strength is in numbers and particularly so in the drive to keep our economy thriving and the envy of the world.

**APPENDIX**

**SAMPLE QUESTIONS ASKED BY STATE & LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN THE BIDDING PROCESS**

**I. Background Information**

**A. Company Financial Condition and References**

 1) Financial Condition

 a) Annual Sales

 i) Most recent fiscal year

 ii) Average for three previous years

 b) Net Worth. [Amount and effective date]

 c) Amount/Value of Inventory in Warehouse

 d) Stock/Ownership Outstanding

 e) Dun & Bradstreet Rating

 2) Bank

 a) Name/street address/city-state-zip/contact name/telephone number

 ABA bank number

 b) Checking account number

 3) Automobile Insurance. [Name of insurer and policy number]

 4) Liability Insurance

 a) Carrier

 b) Policy Number

 c) Expiration Date

 d) Limit

 i) General Aggregate

 ii) Each Occurrence

 5) Workers’ Compensation Insurance

 a) Carrier

 b) Policy Number

 c) Expiration Date

 d) Coverage Limits

 6) Bonding Limits

7) Company Credit References. [Name/address/telephone number/contact name for three references]

 8) Fiscal Year

**B. Company History, Management, and Organization/Structure**

1) History. [Key events, especially regarding incorporation, name revisions and change in ownership]

2) Officers. [Name/office/title/address/city-state-zip and telephone number for all officers; indicate if any relation to current public employees of any jurisdiction of if elected or appointed official of any governmental entity]

3) Board of Directors. [Name/office/title/address/city-state-zip and telephone number for all board members; indicate if any relation to current public employees of any jurisdiction of if elected or appointed official of any governmental entity]

 4) Type of Business/Organization

a) [Indicate if a domestic or foreign corporation; for profit or non-profit corporation; an individual, limited liability company, limited liability partnership, limited partnership, partnership, sole proprietorship, Subchapter S corporation, or trust/estate]

 b) Publicly or privately held

c) [Indicate if a manufacturer, producer or service establishment, association, broker, construction contractor, dealer, distributor, factory or manufacturer’s agent or representative, jobber, joint venture, retailer, or wholesaler]

d) Disadvantaged, minority-owned, women-owned or small business. [Insert applicable category, if any]

e) Subsidiary. [Name/addresses/telephone number/Federal Identification Number of parent, in any]

 f) Affiliated companies. [Names and relevant contact information]

 g) Branches, Divisions, or Subsidiaries. [Names and relevant contact information]

 5) Individuals With Beneficial Interest/Ownership. [Name, gender, race and tenure]

6) Owners or Management Officials Who Have Been Employees of Another Firm That Has an Ownership Interest in or Present Business Relationship with Applicant. [Names/titles]

 7) Management Responsibilities Day to Day

 a) Financial Decisions. [Name/title]

 b) Management. [Name/title]

 c) Estimating. [Name/title]

 d) Marketing & Sales. [Name/title]

 e) Hiring & Firing of Personnel. [Name/title]

 f) Purchasing of Major Items/Supplies. [Name/title]

 8) Number of Employees

 9) Time at Current Address. [Date commenced operations at current location]

**C. Company Customer References**. [Names/addresses/telephone numbers/contact names for at least three references]

**D. Company Occupational Licenses/Registrations to Do Business/Tax Information**

 1) Federal Identification Number. [Current and previous numbers, if any]

 2) Dun & Bradstreet Number.

 3) Registered to Do Business. [Effective Date and Charter Number, if Available][[20]](#footnote-20)

4) Licensed/Registered to Do Business Locally. [Indicate if doing business in the jurisdiction for which the application is being filed]

 5) Human Rights Clearance/Illinois. [Number and effective date]

 6) Subject to Back-Up Federal Income Tax Withholding.

 7) State Tax Information. [Insert relevant information]

**E. Company Location**

 1) Incorporated. [Place and date]

 2) Principal Place of Business. [Address/city/state/zip]

 3) Operations in Other States. [Describe all relevant operations]

 4) Located in a Labor Surplus Area.

 5) Employees Based in Other States. [Numbers and locations]

**F. Signatures for Bids Authorized.** [Name, title, telephone number, and Email address of all individuals authorized to sign bids]

**G. Authorized Agent**. [Indicate if agent for any other party and if so, provide relevant contact information]

**H. Value-Added Network.** [Indicate which network used, if any]

**II. Business Interests**

**A. Principle Lines of Business**. [Describe all lines of business briefly]

**B. Commodity and Service Classifications/National Institute of Governmental Purchasing Classification System.** [Relevant code numbers and titles for all commodities and services provided]

**C. Commodity and Service Classifications/North American Industry Classification System.[[21]](#footnote-21)** [Relevant code numbers and titles for all commodities and services provided]

**III. Contact Information**

**A. Name/Address for Bids/Correspondence/Quotations/Solicitations.** [Name/title/address/city-state-zip/telephone number/fax number/toll-free number/Email address for primary contact]

**B. Name/Address for Accounts Payable/Invoices/Payments/Purchase Orders/Remittances.** [Name/title/address/city-state-zip/telephone number/fax number/toll-free number/Email address for accounts payable contact]

**C. Name/Address for Customer Service.** [Name/title/address/city-state-zip/telephone number/fax number/toll-free number/Email address for primary contact in the event of product/service difficulties]

**D. Name/Address for Returned Materials Including Replacement, Repair, or Credit.** [Name/title/address/city-state-zip/telephone number/fax number/toll-free number/Email address for primary contact]

**E. Internet Home Page URL.** [Insert other acceptable “domain” names]

**IV. Order, Payment and Shipping Information and Terms**

**A. Order Conditions**

 1) Minimum Order

 2) Telephone Orders Accepted

 3) Electronic Ordering. [If yes, provide details]

**B. Payment**

 1) Terms

 2) Prepayment Required.

 3) Credit Cards Accepted. [Indicate type of cards accepted, if any]

 4) Discounts Offered. [Indicate terms and to which entities extended]

 5) Capable of Receiving Electronic Funds Transfer Payments.

**C. Shipping Methods and Terms**

 1) Terms

 2) Method. [Delivery companies used, if any]

**D. Return Policy/Returning Items for Credit/Returning Damaged Goods and Overages.**  [Describe policy, if any]

**E. Electronic Catalogue.**

**V. Miscellaneous Information**

**A. Business Hours.** [Hours and applicable time zones]

**B. Emergency Contact.** [Name/title/telephone number]

**C. Facilities**

 1) Total Office/Manufacturing Space in Square Feet

 2) Manufacturing Floor Space in Square Feet

 3) Warehouse Floor Space in Square Feet

**D. Bankruptcies by any Affiliated Company, Owner, Officer, or Partner within the Last Seven Years.** [If any, provide details]

**E. Convictions for Bribery or Attempted Bribery of a Public Official by any Officer or Employee.** [If any, provide details]

**F. Disqualifications or Suspensions from Doing Business or Removal from Vendor’s List.** [If any, provide details]

**G. Employment of Officers or Owners or Their Relatives By Any Governmental Agency.** [If any, indicate governmental agencies]

**H. Drug Free Workplace Compliance.** Will you certify that a written statement has been given to all employees warning them of the dangers of drug abuse in the workplace; the firm’s policy of maintaining a drug-free environment in all workplaces; the availability of drug counseling, rehabilitation and employee assistance programs; and penalties that may be imposed upon employees for drug abuse violations?

**I. Equal Employment Opportunity Compliance.** For multiple categories of employees, racial breakdowns requested.

**J. Family Leave Compliance.** Will you certify that employees who have worked at least one year with the company will receive 90 days of family leave during any 24 month period for medical reasons, the birth or adoption of a child, or for the care of a child, spouse, or other close relative who has a serious health condition without risk of termination of employment or employer retaliation? [Indicate if company will certify to compliance with the Family and Medical Leave Act as it applies to the company]

**K. Recycling Initiatives**

 1) Products produced from recycled materials. [Indicate products recycled, if any]

 2) Initiatives to Promote Use of Recycled Products. [Describe, if any]

**CONTINUITY PLANNING FOR INDIVIDUALS, SMALL BUSINESSES & NON-PROFIT ASSOCIATIONS**

**Background**

Several years ago, I awoke to see the adjacent apartment building severely damaged by an overnight fire. That shocking scene forced me, a self-employed, home-based consultant, to accept that I’d been too trusting about my ability to survive an emergency unscathed. A few months later, when the Senior Vice President of a consulting client died suddenly, I learned that I wasn’t alone. Even well-established small businesses, especially ones with field staff or telecommuters, weren’t well prepared for emergencies such as sudden staff losses either.

**A Customized Solution**

Based on these experiences and many others with clients, friends, and family, I’ve developed a unique set of continuity planning materials for individuals, small businesses, and volunteer managed non-profit organizations. My Guidebooks are designed to help:

* Assist emergency responders by providing essential information about people and pets at your home and place of business;
* Protect, to the extent possible, your key financial, identification, legal, and professional documents and items of sentimental value;
* Calculate the replacement value of business or personal property to facilitate the purchase of adequate insurance coverage;
* Preserve valuable association and business information;
* Ensure the survival of documentation to support insurance claims and casualty loss deductions;
* Focus on emergency preparedness for pets;
* Organize personal records to smooth estate planning and preparation of a will or a family history;
* Reduce the stress of emergency situations through advance planning; and
* Continue association and business operations and personal life with minimal disruption after an emergency.

Why are they unique? The multiple versions of the Guidebooks:

* Take a comprehensive all hazards approach, covering everything from fires and floods to medical emergencies, theft, and even a sudden job loss (which is its own special form of disaster);
* Speed the planning process by providing easy to use fill-in-the-blank charts and checklists;
* Recognize the diversity of the small business community with specialized materials for artists, farmers/ranchers, managers of restaurants and catering companies, and self-employed professionals (e.g., hairdressers, pet sitters, and technical writers), as well as other conventional small businesses (e.g., repair shops and retail stores);
* Offer guidance specifically to senior citizens and individuals living in apartments (because not everyone is married with children and living in a single-family detached dwelling);
* Allow individuals to plan for emergencies in their personal and professional lives and with their favorite civic, charitable, and professional organizations simultaneously, and
* Require no special software or sophisticated technology (e.g., high speed Internet access) to use, making them a practical, efficient organizational and planning tool for everyone.

Information within the guidebooks is dividing into the following areas, as appropriate:

* Asset protection,
* Educational and professional preparedness,
* Emergency preparedness,
* Family histories,
* Medical preparedness,
* Personal affairs (e.g., serving as a guardian for another),
* Personnel transitions (business versions only), and
* Pet preparedness.

For ease of use, versions are available for:

* Individuals and families,[[22]](#footnote-22)
* Senior citizens;
* Self-employed individuals and small businesses owners;[[23]](#footnote-23) and
* Civic organizations, charities, and professional associations managed by volunteers.

**Summary**

Given the unprecedented number and severity of natural disasters in recent months, you shouldn’t wait another minute to take all necessary steps to protect yourself, your family, your pets, your business, your employees, and your favorite non-profit organizations. As Olympic gold medalist Jacki Joyner – Kersee observed, “It's better to look ahead and prepare than to look back and regret.”

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1. Robbins, Emily, *Big Ideas for Small Business* (Washington, DC: National League of Cities and Center for City Solutions and Applied Research, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A government marketing and public policy consultant based in Austin, Texas, Ms. Lawrence has an extensive background in federal, state, and local government. She served as Research Director for the National Association of Counties and worked in various professional capacities for the US House of Representatives, National Conference of State Legislatures, Oklahoma House of Representatives, National Association of Towns and Townships, and US Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations.

 While with the National Association of Counties (NACo), Lawrence was part of a groundbreaking team that led county governments into the online world. Since leaving the public sector, she has focused on providing marketing support, proposal writing services, and public policy analysis to small, entrepreneurial firms and professional associations. Her former clients include the company that established the electronic procurement network for Texas cities, counties, and school districts (i.e., now known as the BuyBoard) and others in the electronic voting and land records fields.

 In pursuit of her entrepreneurial dream, she’s developed a unique continuity planning service focusing on the needs of individuals, the self-employed, small businesses, and volunteer managed non-profit organizations. As a spinoff of that initiative, she’s been designing knowledge continuity programs for government agencies. Most recently, she has been personally advocating for the transition to digital public libraries.

 Ms. Lawrence earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree with Honors from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln and a Juris Doctorate degree from the University of Texas – Austin. In addition, she attended the LBJ School of Public Affairs. For more information, contact her via “sharontx@concentric.net” or (512) 837-5670. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://businesshub.boston.gov/apex/WizardHome. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://finance.tucsonaz.gov/files/finance/17STEP\_rev0114.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Based on my personal needs, I’d suggest the Shark Tank concept be expanded to include a consumer component, whereby audience members vote separately on whether they would/would not buy the product or service. Access to such broadly based consumer feedback would be invaluable to me as I’m certain it would be to other entrepreneurs. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ginn, Jennifer, “Rethinking How States Encourage Entrepreneurs,” *Council of State Governments E-Newsletter* (May 22, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Establish a user group to ensure that the process always stays sharply focused. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For obvious reasons, the tax system would be kept separate. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. I’d edit the question to ask if the company’s market was local, regional, statewide, multi-state, national, or international). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Again, I’d edit this question and the others regarding minority or veteran owned business status to ask if they are certified as such and the certifying federal, state, or local agency. The question should be framed as well to inquire if the firm graduated (i.e., outgrew) that certification program. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Results of that inquiry should be shared with state legislators as circumstances warrant. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Douglas, Merrill, “The Drive to Modernize: Governments Hatch Strategies to Bring Legacy Applications Up to Date” *Governing* (May 23, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. http://www.bid4Michigan.com. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. http://www.myflcourtaccess.com. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. http://asapmetro.org. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Including everyone who walks into a resource center or visits it online. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The last time I checked the statutes, registration or licensing of some type is required in the following jurisdictions before a company may do business with the state: Alabama, Alaska (business license), California, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland (tax department), Massachusetts (tax department), Minnesota (tax department), Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Dakota (trade names and trademarks also must be registered), Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina (tax too), South Dakota, Washington (in-state businesses only), and Wyoming. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Previously known as the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) Code. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. With guidance customized for those who live in apartments and those who live in single-family detached dwellings. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Materials have been designed to meet the differing needs of these types of enterprises:

	* Artists, composers, craftsmen, musicians, photographers, songwriters, and writers;
	* Catering companies, event planners, and others who provide goods and services at third party locations per advance appointments;
	* Farmers and ranchers;
	* Professionals who deliver their services either on an “as needed” or a regular basis (e.g., lawyers or technical writers);
	* Rental property owners;
	* Repairmen, based either in a mobile shop or at set location, who work on an “as needed” basis (e.g., automobile glass replacement teams and geeks);
	* Retail stores (e.g., craft stores and florist shops);
	* Service providers who operate from a set location on a scheduled basis and with a fairly set clientele (e.g., hairdressers); and
	* Service providers who work at the customer’s home or place of business, either on an “as needed” or regularly scheduled basis (e.g., dog sitters or tree trimmers). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)