

Get Help With Your Plan

To help you write your business plan, we've compiled a list of the resources that will put you on the right track.

URL: <http://www.entrepreneur.com/startingabusiness/businessplans/article38314.html>

By the time you've read this guide and tried your hand at a few of the various components of a plan, you should be ready to go ahead and complete your own. However, there's always room for improvement, and there are a number of resources you can tap into to increase your expertise in plan writing.

Hiring a Consultant

Businesspeople tend to fall into two camps when it comes to consultants. Some believe strongly in the utility and value of hiring outside experts to bring new perspective and broad knowledge to challenging tasks. Others feel consultants are overpaid yes-men brought in only to endorse plans already decided on or to take the heat for unpopular but necessary decisions.

Who's right? Both are, depending on the consultant you hire and your purpose for hiring one. Most consultants are legitimate experts in specific or general business areas. And most consultants can be hired to help with all or part of the process of writing a business plan.

The downside is, you have to spend a lot of time on communication before and during the process of working with a consultant. Be sure you have fully explained—and the consultant fully understands—the nature of your business, your concept and strategy, your financial needs, and other matters such as control, future plans and so on. Refer to these important issues throughout the process—you don't want to pay for a beautifully done plan that fits somebody else's business, not yours. And when the work is done, debrief the consultant to find out if there is anything you can learn that wasn't included in the plan.

If you decide to hire a consultant to help you prepare your plan, take care to select the right person. Here are some guidelines:

- 1. Get referrals.** Ask colleagues, acquaintances and professionals such as bankers, accountants and lawyers for the names of business plan consultants they recommend. A good referral goes a long way to easing any concerns you may have. Few consultants advertise anyway, so referrals may be your only choice.
- 2. Look for a fit.** Find a consultant who is expert in helping businesses like yours. Ideally, the consultant should have lots of experience with companies of similar size and age in similar industries. Avoid general business experts or those who lack experience in your field.
- 3. Check references.** Get the names of at least three clients the consultant has helped to write plans. Call the former clients and ask about the consultant's performance. Was the consultant's final fee in line with the original estimate? Was the plan completed on time? Did it serve the intended purpose?
- 4. Get it in writing.** Have a legal contract for the consultant's services. It should discuss in detail the fee, when it will be paid and under what circumstances. And make sure you get a detailed written description of what the consultant must do to earn the fee. Whether it's an hourly rate or a flat fee isn't as important as each party knowing exactly what's expected of them.

Organizations

- **[Small Business Development Centers \(SBDCs\)](#):** SBDCs offer a wide variety of information and guidance to individuals and small businesses. If you need help developing your business plan, the SBDC counselors can help by offering assistance with market research, cash-flow projections and more. And, in most cases, the help is free.
- **[SCORE](#):** The Service Corps of Retired Executives, more commonly known as SCORE, is a nonprofit group of mostly retired businesspeople who volunteer to provide counseling to small businesses at no charge. A program of the SBA, SCORE has been around since 1964 and has helped millions of entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs.

SCORE is a source for all kinds of business advice, from how to write a business plan to investigating marketing potential and managing cash flow. SCORE counselors work out of hundreds of local chapters throughout the United States. You can obtain a referral to a counselor in your local chapter by contacting the national office.

- **[National Business Incubation Association](#):** The NBIA is the national organization for business incubators, which are organizations specially set up to nurture young firms and help them survive and grow. Incubators provide leased office facilities on flexible

terms, shared business services, management assistance, help in obtaining financing, and technical support. Its services include providing a directory to local incubators and their services.

- [Chamber of commerce](#): The many chambers of commerce throughout the United States are organizations devoted to providing networking, lobbying, training and more. If you think chambers are all about having lunch with a bunch of community boosters, think again. Among the services the U.S. Chamber of Commerce offers is a web-based business solutions program that provides online help with specific small-business needs, including planning, marketing and other tasks such as creating a press release, collecting a bad debt, recruiting employees or creating a retirement plan.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is the umbrella organization for local chambers. If you plan on doing business overseas, don't forget to check for an American Chamber of Commerce in the countries where you hope to have a presence. They are set up to provide information and assistance to U.S. firms seeking to do business there. Many, but not all, countries have American Chambers.

- [Copyright Clearance Center](#)
- [Copyright Office, Library of Congress](#)
- [Department of Agriculture](#)
- [Department of Commerce](#)
- [Department of Energy](#)
- [Department of Interior](#)
- [Department of Labor](#)
- [Department of Treasury](#)
- [Export-Import Bank of the United States](#)
- [Internal Revenue Service](#)
- [Patent and Trademark Office](#)
- [Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents](#)
- [Securities and Exchange Commission](#)
- [Small Business Administration](#)
- [SBA Small Business Development Centers](#)

State Commerce Departments

[Alabama](#)
[Alaska](#)
[Arizona](#)
[Arkansas](#)
[California](#)
[Colorado](#)
[Connecticut](#)
[Delaware](#)
[Florida](#)
[Georgia](#)
[Hawaii](#)
[Idaho](#)
[Illinois](#)
[Indiana](#)
[Iowa](#)
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[Texas](#)
[Utah](#)
[Vermont](#)
[Virginia](#)
[Washington](#)
[West Virginia](#)
[Wisconsin](#)
[Wyoming](#)

Software and Books

- [Business PlanPro](#) from Palo Alto Software
 - [Business Plan Writer Deluxe](#) from Nova Development
 - [Business Plans for Dummies](#) by Paul Tiffany, Ph.D., and Steven D. Peterson, Ph.D.
 - [Business Plans Kit for Dummies \(with CD-ROM\)](#) by Paul Tiffany, Ph.D., and Steven D. Peterson, Ph.D.
 - [Creating a Successful Business Plan](#) from Entrepreneur Press
 - [The Ernst & Young Business Plan Guide](#) by Eric S. Siegel, Brian R. Ford and Jay M. Bornstein
 - [Rules Book of Business Plans](#) by Roger C. Rule
 - [Start Your Own Business](#) by Rieva Lesonsky
 - [The Successful Business Plan: Secrets and Strategies](#) by Rhonda Abrams
 - [Writing a Convincing Business Plan](#) by Arthur L DeThomas, Ph.D., and Lin Gensing Pophal
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Miss any sections of our **Business Plan How-To**? Read our entire how-to:

- [An Introduction to Business Plans](#)
- [Plan Your Plan](#)
- [Elements of a Business Plan](#)
- [Get Help With Your Plan](#)