

Steps to Obtain a Business License

License application requirements can vary by license type.

For additional information and useful links, visit Chicago.gov/BusinessLicensing

1) Obtain Business Registrations and Documents

Register your business with the appropriate government entities and gather other required documents to identify your business including registration with the Illinois Secretary of State, a Tax ID number from the Illinois Department of Revenue, and an EIN number from the Internal Revenue Service.

2) Submit License Application

Submit a Business Information Sheet at the Small Business Center to begin the application process, or apply online at www.chicago.gov/BusinessDirect. To apply, you must specify:

- Business registration information from step 1
- Ownership information
- The business address
- The square footage of the business location
- A detailed description of all business activities to be conducted

3) Receive Zoning Approval

Every new business license application is reviewed to ensure that the proposed business activity is allowed at the business location per the Chicago Zoning Ordinance. The zoning approval process may include:

- Review of a detailed, accurate description of the proposed business activity and business space
- Review of architectural plans prepared by a licensed architect, and Department of Buildings building permits.
- Review of compliance with parking requirements
- Verification of valid driveway permits from the Chicago Department of Transportation

Zoning Reminders: Do not enter into any financial commitment unless the City has confirmed as part of the license application process that your proposed business activity is allowed at your business address. Do not assume that the previous occupant's zoning designation applies to you. Note that you may require architectural plans prepared by a licensed architect and DOB building permits to establish your use.

4) Complete Application

BACP will provide you with a full license application following zoning approval for your completion and submittal

5) Pay for License

Once BACP ensures that your application is complete, you will be required to pay for the license. License fees are non-refundable and vary in cost based on license type. After payment, you may be required to pass license inspections in step 6 before your license is issued.

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6) Pass License Inspections

Inspections by one or more City departments may be required based on the license type. Typical inspections include:

- Debt Check: Any debt that the applicant or any controlling person owes to the City must be resolved before the license is issued. The Department of Finance offers payment plans for some debt types.
- Health Inspection: The Chicago Department of Public Health inspects food businesses and some other license types.
- Building Inspection: The Department of Buildings inspects public places of amusement, children's facilities, and some other license types.
- Fire Inspection: The Fire Department inspects garages, gas stations, mobile food vehicles, and some other license types.
- Fingerprint-Based Criminal History Investigation: Some license types require that every owner, corporate owner and other controlling persons be fingerprinted. A complete Individual History Form for each individual is required, as well as a \$40 processing fee per person.

7) Resolve Any Account Holds

Holds on your account for expired permits, overdue City tax filings, outstanding fines, or other City debt, among other items, will prevent your license from issuing. Notices of holds including instructions on how to resolve the hold are sent by mail to your business location and are also viewable on Chicago Business Direct at www.chicago.gov/BusinessDirect.

8) Receive License Certificate

Congratulations! Once all inspections are passed in step 6 and holds resolved in step 7, the license will be mailed to your business address. If you request ahead of time, the license can also be picked up at the Small Business Center. The license certificate must be displayed at your place of business at all times.

You must renew your license online via Chicago Business Direct at www.chicago.gov/BusinessDirect to operate beyond the license expiration date. To renew online, create a User Profile by clicking on "Register Today" and follow the instructions.

For questions, call 312.74.GOBIZ (744-6249) or 312.744.1944 for TTY, or
email businesslicense@cityofchicago.org

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City Hall, 121 N. LaSalle, Room 805, Chicago, IL 60602
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