

Make a Difference

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RESOURCES FOR WHIDBEY RESIDENTS STARTING A RURAL BUSINESS

Small businesses are the backbone of many rural communities. For areas lacking the infrastructure to support large companies or manufacturing facilities, supporting local entrepreneurship can be a valuable economic development strategy. Whidbey Island clearly fits this profile. We lack sewers and we're inconveniently located in terms of major transportation routes. Housing is in short supply and practically non-existent for low- to medium wage earners.

What Whidbey Island does have is an incredible spirit of entrepreneurship amongst our residents. We've got talent, brains, and hard workers. Look at our farmers and food producers. Restauranters and retailers. Our creative professionals and service providers. Our landscapers and contractors. These small, locally owned businesses keep profits in our community and contribute to the wonderful experience Whidbey Island provides to tourists and residents alike.

"The most effective development strategy for rural communities is small entrepreneurship—locally owned and operated small businesses," according to the Center for Rural Affairs. Here on Whidbey Island, new and established entrepreneurs don't need to look far for technical assistance and networking opportunities. And if you're willing to take an online class or leave the Island, your possibilities are endless. Following is a list of resources to dive into during the New Year to help you attain your business goals.

To help you get started, I've added a "first step" suggestion under each entry. Add these to your January to-do list and you'll be well on your way to putting

your new business on a good footing or taking your business to the next level. The rest is up to you!

(Whidbey Island resources are listed first, followed by off-Island and online resources.)

Free Business Workshops

Goosefoot is a nonprofit organization located on South Whidbey that works together with the community to create essential solutions. Helping local businesses grow is one of our major areas of focus and Goosefoot has been offering workshops for the past three years. Topics include business planning, marketing, business taxes, social media, branding, print/web design, food business licensing requirements, and more. A new social media learning track will be introduced in 2020. www.goosefoot.org/workshops

Our local libraries on Whidbey Island offer free business workshops as well. Be sure to visit www.sno-isle.org/business and sign up for their business newsletter to get notifications of workshops and other resources.

First step: Sign up for a Goosefoot workshop. Sign up for the Sno-Isle Libraries' business newsletter (you'll need a library card).

Shared Commercial Kitchen

Goosefoot and the Port of South Whidbey are collaborating on the expansion of an existing kitchen space at the Island County Fairgrounds to assist with the incubation of new food businesses. The addition of a baking kitchen, cold and dry storage, and professional food processing equipment will enable users to work more efficiently and expand production. www.whidbeykitchen.org/

First step: Attend Goosefoot's "Intro to Food Business Licensing" workshop.

Whidbey Island Local Lending (WILL) and Whidbey Entrepreneurs (WE)

Whidbey Island Local Lending is a social network connecting business owners looking for capital with community members able to make loans. Because loans need to be made between people who know each other, social events or "mash-ups" are hosted monthly. Whidbey Entrepreneurs' focus is on networking and mentoring. WILL and WE have teamed up to double their efforts to help current and aspiring entrepreneurs. Mash-ups are held every third Thursday (except for December), 5-7 p.m., at the Useless Bay Golf and Country Club. <https://whidbeylocalending.wordpress.com/> or find Whidbey Entrepreneurs on Facebook.

First step: Attend the Jan. 16 or Feb. 20 mash-up to network and hear a presentation.

Business Mentors

The Economic Development Council of Island County (EDCIC) brings a mentor to its Coupeville office twice a month from the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in Mount Vernon. Call 360-678-6889. <http://iscoedc.com/>

The Freeland Library hosts a mentor from the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) twice a month. Call the library to book your appointment at 360-331-7323.

First step: Before seeking the help of these experienced professionals, be prepared to provide as many details about your business as possible. Have questions in mind.

Network, Network, Network!

Don't underestimate the power of networking to build your business. In addition to the monthly WILL/WE mash-ups described above, our Chambers of Commerce offer fun social opportunities to meet potential clients, mentors, and friends. You are a member of your local Chamber, aren't you?

If you serve our local food or tourism sectors, check out Whidbey Island Grown (WIG). Dedicated to promoting Whidbey as a destination for authentic rural, farm, and culinary experiences and products, WIG is a perfect launching ground for business collaboration and partnerships. <https://whidbeyislandgrown.com/>

First step: Join your local Chamber of Commerce. Already a member? Join another.

If you're a food grower/producer or own a hospitality business, join WIG.

Research, Research, Research!

Another reason to love our library! Did you know one of Sno-Isle Libraries' strategic priorities is "strengthening our economy by supporting entrepreneurs and small business owners?" Their business services team can help you use their online business research tools for a wide variety of market research tasks. Find market and industry reports, demographic data, and identify potential competition. And don't be afraid to ask them for help. It's what they're there for. www.sno-isle.org/business/

First step: Visit their "Start Your Business" or "Grow Your Business" section.

BUSINESS.WA.GOV

Home of Washington State's Small Business Liaison Team (SBLT), their goal is to make it easier to do business in our state. Their site contains all you need to know about owning a business in Washington, including the permits, approvals, or licenses you might need.

First step: Read their "Road Map for opening a business," with step-by-step instructions about how to register and license your business in Washington state.

U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)

The SBA has a robust selection of learning materials on its site for both new and experienced entrepreneurs, especially in the areas of funding and procuring government contracts. Their online business guide is perfect for those preferring to learn on their own, at their own pace. Note their helpful "write your business plan" section. www.sba.gov/offices/district/wa/seattle

First step: Set aside some time with SBA's online Business Guide (first tab to the left on the top of the home page).

SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives)

SCORE, with a focus on mentoring, also offers resources for seasoned business owners. Their workshops (\$50), webinars and videos are quite comprehensive, with titles such as Trademarks and Copyrights; Year-End Tax Planning; and Funding Options for Veteran Entrepreneurs. <https://seattle.score.org/>

First step: Sign up for SCORE'S newsletter (go to bottom of each web page, below their address).

Overwhelmed at the large menu of options available? Don't be. Give some thought to what type of help you need. Peruse the resources above. Follow the "first steps" provided. And, most importantly, ask for advice!

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