



How to Start a Catering Business

This article is an overview of the issues and requirements that you will need to consider and deal with if you want to start a catering career and launch a business in the food industry. Rules and regulations regarding such businesses will vary from state to state and even within the given county and municipality in which you choose to operate, so make sure to check with your local governmental bodies to ensure that you comply with all the relevant regulations.



All people who handle food for public consumption are generally required to have a permit to do so. In order to qualify for a permit, those looking to build a catering career and business must usually complete a plan review for the

service they are looking to offer to the public. This entails the submission of detailed plans covering the food serving and preparation facilities as well as a proposed menu to a plans examiner, a government official who is responsible for reviewing and testing the ability of those responsible for food preparation to comply with the stringent rules and regulations necessary to ensure public safety (not to mention ensuring the business's reputation for quality and hygiene).

The plans examiner will usually require the completion of a food service establishment plan and a plan review application together with an appropriate fee payable to the relevant authority. Those embarking on a catering career may find it helpful to obtain the services of an experienced professional who is well-versed in these application processes to help them navigate the maze of regulations and ensure the very best chance of gaining the necessary permits.

In addition to this set of permits, a food service permit is also usually required before one is allowed to provide food at private parties and functions, and you should also check what other permits and requirements exist in your own locality prior to commencing your catering career and business.

A universal requirement is the need for yourself and any employees to attend a food handling and preparation training session. Food safety courses are frequently offered by local regulatory bodies or other approved institutions licensed for the purpose, and these courses will cover the training and testing involved in ensuring that you and your staff are able to safely handle and prepare food for the public. The cost of these courses is not usually very high and can be as little as \$10 for a single session which may last only 90 minutes or less, depending on the ability of attendees to digest the course material.



Food safety courses cover the storage of food and safe food handling practices as well as outlining food safety standards and definitions. How to handle food safely and avoid cross contamination between cooked

and uncooked foods, particularly meat, fish, and poultry, in addition to the safe preparation of food and the standards that must be adhered to, including the legal implications for breaking the law and endangering public health and safety, are all likely to be covered.

In addition, first aid issues for food-related accidents such as choking on food will also be covered, and many permits require both theoretical and practical training before the requisite test can be satisfactorily completed. Again, the individual requirements for the test and permit issuance will vary depending upon who is issuing the permits and where you are conducting business.

Once you have overcome the hurdles involved in obtaining the necessary permits, there remains the issue of raising the money for your catering business venture. Working for yourself and running a business are very different being someone else's employee. You will be responsible for all aspects of your own business, even for the acts of your employees, and at the end of the day, you need to be able to cover all of your expenses and costs to be able to operate effectively and turn a profit.

Here are some tips to help you raise the money for your catering career as a business owner.

First of all, gather together your credit report and the details of your personal financial situation. You will also need to prepare a detailed business plan projecting your income as well as your probable expenses. Frequently, the services of an accountant are required to help you do this, because you need to get it right, not least for presenting the plan to potential lenders and investors but also to show what you are likely to earn from the business.



Food Services Job Feature

Pulling together your menu and detailing key aspects of the catering service you intend to provide, including recipes and signature dishes, is something you will already have covered with the plans examiner for your permits; however, here you are looking to demonstrate to backers that your business venture and catering abilities have actually got what it takes to be successful and offer a sound investment.

Approaching your bank for funding is usually a difficult process as banks do not like to lend to new ventures unless they have a track record to demonstrate that any loan repayment can be serviced. Otherwise, you will likely need to provide some form of collateral. In short, it is by no means impossible to get a bank loan, but it is fairly unlikely that you will convince your bank to lend to you for a new business unless you can demonstrate a catering career track record or provide them with some other assurance.

You can, however, approach the Small Business Association for a small business loan and also check with your local Chamber of Commerce for possible leads on investors who will consider backing you. Using some of your signature recipes and food offerings with your potential funding contacts, friends, and family may also help to persuade potential investors that you are worth backing and help get your catering career off the ground.

Whichever route you take and no matter what catering and food service you are looking to launch your catering career with, careful planning and preparation are the key to your success (and not just when it comes to making good food). There are numerous resources and support agencies that are more than happy to go through your plans with you, and it pays to lay the groundwork as thoroughly as possible before you start committing your money and time to any new venture.

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