



YEARS of TURNING

Visions into Ventures

Essential Resources for Women Entrepreneurs in Texas



TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

JANE NELSON INSTITUTE
for WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Center for Women Entrepreneurs





Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Getting Started	2
Funding and Financial Support	4
Operations and Management	6
Certifications and Legal Support	10
Marketing, Branding and Online Presence	12
Networking, Mentorship and Women-Specific Resources	15
Learning and Skill Building	18
Index	20



Welcome to Turning Visions into Ventures: A Guide for Women Entrepreneurs in Texas.

This guide has been crafted by the Center for Women Entrepreneurs (CWE), a program of the Jane Nelson Institute for Women's Leadership at Texas Woman's University, to provide essential resources, guidance, and tools for women pursuing or growing their businesses in Texas.

We believe that women entrepreneurs are vital drivers of economic growth, and through this guide, we aim to support you on your journey from vision to venture.

This booklet provides a comprehensive guide to starting and growing your business, including how to navigate legal requirements, secure funding, market your brand, and tap into valuable networking opportunities. We've curated the most relevant resources and tools, tailored specifically to the needs of women entrepreneurs in Texas.

As you read through the sections, remember that you're not alone on this journey. The Center for Women Entrepreneurs is here to support you every step of the way. If you ever need assistance, feel free to reach out to us – we are your resource and advocate.

**Together, let's turn your visions into
successful ventures!**

About the Jane Nelson Institute for Women's Leadership

The Jane Nelson Institute for Women's Leadership at Texas Woman's University is dedicated to preparing women for successful careers in business and public service. Its three specialized centers — Center for Student Leadership, Center for Women Entrepreneurs, and Center for Women in Government — ensure women have the education to establish careers as successful executives, the skills for building entrepreneurial businesses and the framework needed to excel in public service.



Center for Women Entrepreneurs

About the Center for Women Entrepreneurs

The Center for Women Entrepreneurs (CWE) empowers Texas women to build and scale thriving businesses through expert advising, strategic funding opportunities, and comprehensive training programs. Its professional network and curated resources equip entrepreneurs with the tools and connections essential for long-term success in today's competitive business landscape.

The CWE is funded to help women across Texas start and grow their businesses. You do not have to be connected to the Texas Woman's University System to benefit from services. All programs are free.

Programs and Initiatives

WomenRISE – A monthly networking and professional development breakfast where women business owners connect and receive professional training.

Saturday & Quarterly Workshops – Virtual and in-person sessions featuring expert-led training and panel discussions on specialty topics.

Small Business Advising – Free advising on all aspects of starting and growing a business, including startup assistance, business planning, financing, marketing, expansion, and exit planning.

Grant Funding – Since 2018, CWE has awarded over \$2 million in grants to women-owned small businesses in Texas.

- *StartHER* (applications open in August) – Awards grants of \$5,000 each to women-owned startups to launch new initiatives and drive early-stage growth through innovative projects
- *Veteran Woman Entrepreneur* (applications open in January) – Awards grants of \$5,000 each to Texas women veterans
- *Texas Rural Woman Entrepreneur* (applications open in May) – Awards grants starting at \$5,000 or \$10,000 each to rural woman-owned small businesses to undertake new and innovative projects

AccelerateHER Program – A 15-week startup training program providing resources and education to help early-stage women entrepreneurs build scalable businesses. The program has recurring locations in Denton, Dallas, and Houston. The program travels across the state and has had programs in Abilene, Austin, Corpus Christi, and Mission.

Getting Started

Business Formation

Launching a business is an exciting journey, and it all begins with a solid foundation. From defining your business idea to making it official with the state of Texas, this section walks you through the first steps to bring your vision to life.

Step 1: Create a Business Plan

A business plan is your roadmap. It outlines what you'll sell, who your customers are, how you'll operate, and what your goals are. You likely already know this information. Having a plan helps you stay focused, attract funding, and make better business decisions. It's also often required when applying for grants or loans.

Pro Tip: The CWE offers a free LivePlan online template that is user friendly. Contact cwe@twu.edu for access.

Don't forget to name your business! You'll want something short, so it is easy to use as an email, but also unique, catchy, and descriptive. Say it out loud and make sure it sounds good. Oh, and do a quick search to make sure the name isn't already in use. It's best to check in the URL bar, as repeatedly checking on domain seller websites can cause the price to go up.

Governor's Small Business Portal – This important tool offers a customized list of useful business resources to assist you in starting or growing your business in Texas.

Texas Secretary of State – SOSDirect – This is the official site for Texas business entity records and the best place to check for name availability for LLCs, corporations, and other formal entities.

United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) Trademark Database – Even if the name is available in Texas, someone might have a national trademark on it. A quick search here ensures the name isn't federally protected – important if one's plan is to grow or protect the brand.



Elements of a Business Plan

- **Executive Summary** – A brief overview of your entire business plan, typically written last after all other sections are complete.
- **Market and Competitive Analysis** – A look at your industry, your ideal customers, and how you stack up against the competition.
- **Products and Services/Marketing and Sales Plans** – What you offer, why people will love it, and how you plan to get the word out.
- **Financial Projections** – A peek at the numbers – how much you expect to make, spend, and grow over time.



SBA Business Plan Guide – Offers templates and examples tailored to small businesses.

Step 2: Choose Your Business Structure

This is the legal form your business takes. It affects your taxes, legal liability, and registration requirements. To decide which structure is best for you, consider if you're going solo or teaming up, the importance of protecting your personal assets, if you want to keep it simple or go more official, how you want to be taxed, and your plan for growth. Once you're ready, head over to the Texas Secretary of State's website to begin your registration.

Common Business Entities in Texas

Sole Proprietorship

- One person runs the show—they own everything and are personally responsible for all debts.
- Easiest and most affordable way to start.
- File an Assumed Name form with your county (aka a DBA – “doing business as”)
- Cost: Around \$25

Limited Liability Company (LLC)

- Can be just you or a group—owners are called “members.”
- Helps protect your personal stuff (like your house or car) from business debts.
- Keeps business and personal finances separate.
- File Form 205 with the Texas Secretary of State
- Cost: \$300

Corporation (Inc.)

- A more formal setup – the business is its own legal entity, separate from you.
- Can make money, pay taxes, and be legally responsible like a person.
- Must have at least one Director, issue shares of common stock, and keep up with things like annual meetings and corporate minutes.
- File Form 201 with the Texas Secretary of State
- Cost: \$300

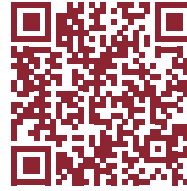
Step 3: Get a Federal EIN

Your Employer Identification Number (EIN) is like a Social Security number for your business. You'll need it to open a business bank account, hire employees, and file taxes. You can apply for an EIN at no cost through the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) online by visiting IRS.gov.

Step 4: Set-up a Business Bank Account

Opening a separate business bank account is one of the most important steps you can take when starting your business. Keeping your business and personal finances separate protects your personal assets, simplifies your bookkeeping, makes tax time easier, and helps you build credibility with customers and vendors.

Opening a business bank account is more than just good practice — it helps you maintain legal protection if your business is an LLC or corporation (this is called preserving the “corporate veil”), builds trust with customers and suppliers, and creates a professional image for your business. It also makes it much easier to apply for loans, grants, or government programs that require proof of a business bank account.



Opening a Business Bank Account

Step 5: Register Locally & Get Permits

Good news, Texas doesn't require a general business license! Instead, you just need to register your business with the Texas Secretary of State (for LLCs and corporations) or your county clerk's office (for sole proprietor/assumed name or (DBA).

Once you've got your Certificate of Formation or Assumed Name Certificate, you're good to go. This counts as your “license” to do business in Texas, even though other states might require a separate one. Depending on your business type and location, you may need local permits or licenses. Check with your city and county for permits and zoning rules and explore the Texas-wide permit guide to see what applies. Staying compliant avoids fines and ensures you can legally operate.

Step 6: Build Your BAIL Team

Remember this helpful acronym, BAIL – **B**anker, **A**ccountant, **I**nsurance agent, and **L**awyer. These advisors are key to building a business that's protected and financially healthy. You don't need to hire all four at once. Start small—maybe with a quick consultation with an accountant or a local business lawyer—and build your team over time.

These relationships can save you time, money, and stress as your business grows. To get started, talk with other small business owners about who they trust and what their experience has been like. You can also check out your local Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Chamber of Commerce, or women's business center as they often have lists of recommended professionals. Some even offer free or low-cost consultations to help you get started.



Build Your BAIL Team

Funding and Financial Support

Getting the money to start or grow a business can be one of the biggest hurdles for women entrepreneurs, but there are resources out there designed just for you. From grants and loans to capital investors, this section introduces different ways to fund your business and where to find them.



Where to Look

Jane Nelson Institute for Women's Leadership,
Center for Women Entrepreneurs

- *StarHER* – Awards grants of \$5,000 each to women-owned startups to launch new initiatives and drive early-stage growth through innovative projects.
- *Veteran Woman Entrepreneur* – Awards grants of \$5,000 each to Texas veteran woman-owned small businesses.
- *Texas Rural Woman Entrepreneur* – Awards grants of \$5,000 or \$10,000 each to rural woman-owned, small businesses to undertake new and innovative projects.

Other Resources

- *Hello Alice* – Curates national and local grant opportunities.
- *Amber Grant for Women (WomensNet)* – Provides monthly grants of up to \$10,000 to support female entrepreneurs starting businesses.
- *Texas Grant Watch* – A collection of over 200 grants available to start or grow a small business in Texas, including grants for women, minorities, and veterans.
- *Galaxy of Stars Grants Finder* – User-friendly, searchable online directory of grant opportunities.
- *Grants.gov* – The central hub for finding and applying for federal grant opportunities across all U.S. government agencies.

- *IFundWomen* – A platform offering grants, crowdfunding, coaching, and community support for women entrepreneurs.
- *Texas Department of Agriculture* – Offers a variety of grants and support programs for rural, agricultural, and food-related businesses in Texas. Some grants are seasonal or industry-specific.
- *Fund Her Future* – A grant program from Block Advisors by H&R Block, open to women business owners nationwide. One grand prize winner receives a \$50,000 grant, while five additional small businesses get \$10,000 each.
- *PenFed Foundation* – Veteran Entrepreneur Investment Program (VEIP) – Supports veteran-owned and military spouse-owned small businesses through access to capital and resources.
- *Google Ad Grants* – Provides eligible nonprofits with up to \$10,000/month in free Google Ads to promote their missions and reach new audiences.

Tips for Applying

Read, Read, Read – Before doing anything else, you should read through the grant proposal, guidelines and FAQs to get an idea of what is required on the application and if you are eligible to apply. Determine if you meet the qualifications, if you are eligible to apply and you understand what the grant requirements are.

Ask Questions – If you have questions about the application process, check the FAQs first. If you still need help, contact the grant provider and include all your questions in one email. Be sure to ask before submitting, as most organizations do not allow changes or resubmissions.

Craft Your Proposal – Start by making a checklist of all the materials you need to submit. Prepare your budget early, as it plays a major role in funding decisions. Take time to research and develop a clear, high-quality proposal. Use simple language that anyone can understand, and ask someone outside your industry to review it for clarity.

Allow Plenty of Time – Deadlines come up quickly, so make sure you have taken the time to proofread your application. Technology can fail and it might take longer than you had planned to submit something online. Even a few seconds past the deadline can disqualify an application.

Small Business Loans & CDFIs

Loans are borrowed money you repay over time—often with interest. Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) offer more flexible terms than traditional banks and offer smaller loan amounts. They're often more accessible for new entrepreneurs, especially women, people of color, or those without a long credit history.

Generally, banks are more comfortable offering assistance to businesses that have been in existence for a number of years and have a proven financial track record. If the business has consistently made a profit and that profit can cover the payment of additional debt, it is likely that the loan will be approved. However, if the business is a start-up or has been operating marginally and has an opportunity to grow, it is necessary to prepare a thorough loan package with a detailed explanation including how the business will be able to repay the loan.

Before you approach a lender for a loan, you will need to understand the factors the bank will use to evaluate your application, such as:

- Types of financing
- Ability to repay
- Credit history
- Equity investment
- Collateral
- Management experience

Top Texas Resources

- *PeopleFund* – Offers low-interest loans, business education, and mentorship.
- *LiftFund* – Specializes in underserved entrepreneurs across Texas.
- *BCL of Texas* – Provides financing and business support services.
- *Local CDFIs* – Also includes TMFund and Tricolor for specific lending options.

Investment Capital & Equity Funding

Equity funding (or investment capital) is money raised by a company in exchange for a share of ownership in the business. Equity financing allows a business to obtain funds without incurring debt, or without having to repay a specific amount of money at a particular time.

Most small or growth-stage businesses use limited equity financing. Equity often comes from investors such as friends, relatives, employees, customers, or industry colleagues.

The most common source of equity funding comes from venture capitalists. These are institutional risk takers and

may be groups of wealthy individuals, government-assisted sources, or major financial institutions. Most specialize in one or a few closely related industries.

Where to Start:

- *TSBCI (Texas Small Business Credit Initiative)* – Connects businesses with credit programs.
- *Swan Impact Network* – Impact investing focused on social and environmental goals.
- *TEN Capital* – Helps connect startups with angel investors.
- *iFundWomen* – A funding platform and accelerator designed specifically for women entrepreneurs.

Know Your Worth: Wage & Pricing Insight

Setting the right price for your product or service is crucial — not just to cover your costs, but to reflect the value of your work and sustain your business. Likewise, knowing standard wage ranges can help when budgeting for employees, contractors, or even deciding what to pay yourself. This data-driven approach builds confidence in your pricing decisions and helps ensure your business stays competitive in your market.

Pro Tip: Look at your competitors' prices — but also factor in your unique value, experience, and cost structure. Don't race to the bottom — price for sustainability and growth.

Key Uses

- *Pricing Your Products or Services* – Review industry benchmarks to avoid undercharging and to ensure you're covering costs and making a profit.
- *Hiring and Payroll Planning* – Understand fair wages for roles you may hire for (e.g., virtual assistant, bookkeeper, production help).
- *Grant and Loan Applications* – Use wage and pricing data to build stronger financial projections and budgets for funders.

Resources

- *Bureau of Labor Statistics – Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics* – Search by job title, industry, or geographic region. Filter by Texas or a specific metro area to find average wages and employment data.
- *Texas Workforce Commission – Labor Market & Career Info* – Offers state-specific wage data and trends, helpful for comparing local market conditions.
- *SCORE Business Plan Financial Projections Template* – Use this Excel tool to input your wage estimates and pricing structure into a full financial plan.

Operations and Management

Running a business is about more than just a great idea — it takes systems, tools, and structure. This section walks you through key areas of operations and management to help your business stay organized, professional, and ready for growth.

Managing Payments

Whether you're selling products online or offering services in person, you need a secure and reliable way to get paid. These platforms are beginner-friendly and commonly used by small businesses:

- *Square* – Great for pop-up shops, farmers markets, and retail settings. It comes with hardware options and point-of-sale tools.
- *PayPal* – A widely accepted online payment system, especially for service-based or online-only businesses.
- *Stripe* – Ideal for e-commerce websites; integrates well with platforms like Shopify and Wix.

Pro Tip: Start with one platform, test how it works for your business, and add others only if needed. Keep transaction fees and customer convenience in mind.

Business Communication Tools

A dedicated business phone number helps establish credibility with customers, gives your brand a more professional presence, and allows you to maintain work-life boundaries. It can also help streamline customer communication as your business grows.

- *Google Voice* – A free or affordable option that allows you to select a custom number, forward calls to your mobile device, and access voicemail via email. It's ideal for startups or solo entrepreneurs needing a basic but effective solution.
- *CloudPhone* – A paid service with robust features like auto-attendants, call routing, multiple extensions, and voicemail-to-text. It's useful for businesses anticipating growth or managing remote teams.
- *Google Workspace (Gmail for Business)* – Gives you a branded email address (like yourname@yourbusiness.com), along with access to Google Docs, Drive, and Calendar.

- *Slack* – A team messaging tool that makes internal communication easier as your team grows.
- *Zoom* – For virtual meetings and client consultations. It's useful for service-based businesses or remote teams.

Insurance: Protecting Your Business

Business insurance isn't just for large companies — it's a critical piece of protection for small business owners, too. A single accident, lawsuit, or natural disaster can put your venture at serious risk without the right coverage. Insurance provides peace of mind and a financial safety net so you can focus on growing your business.

Here are three reputable options that cater specifically to small business needs:

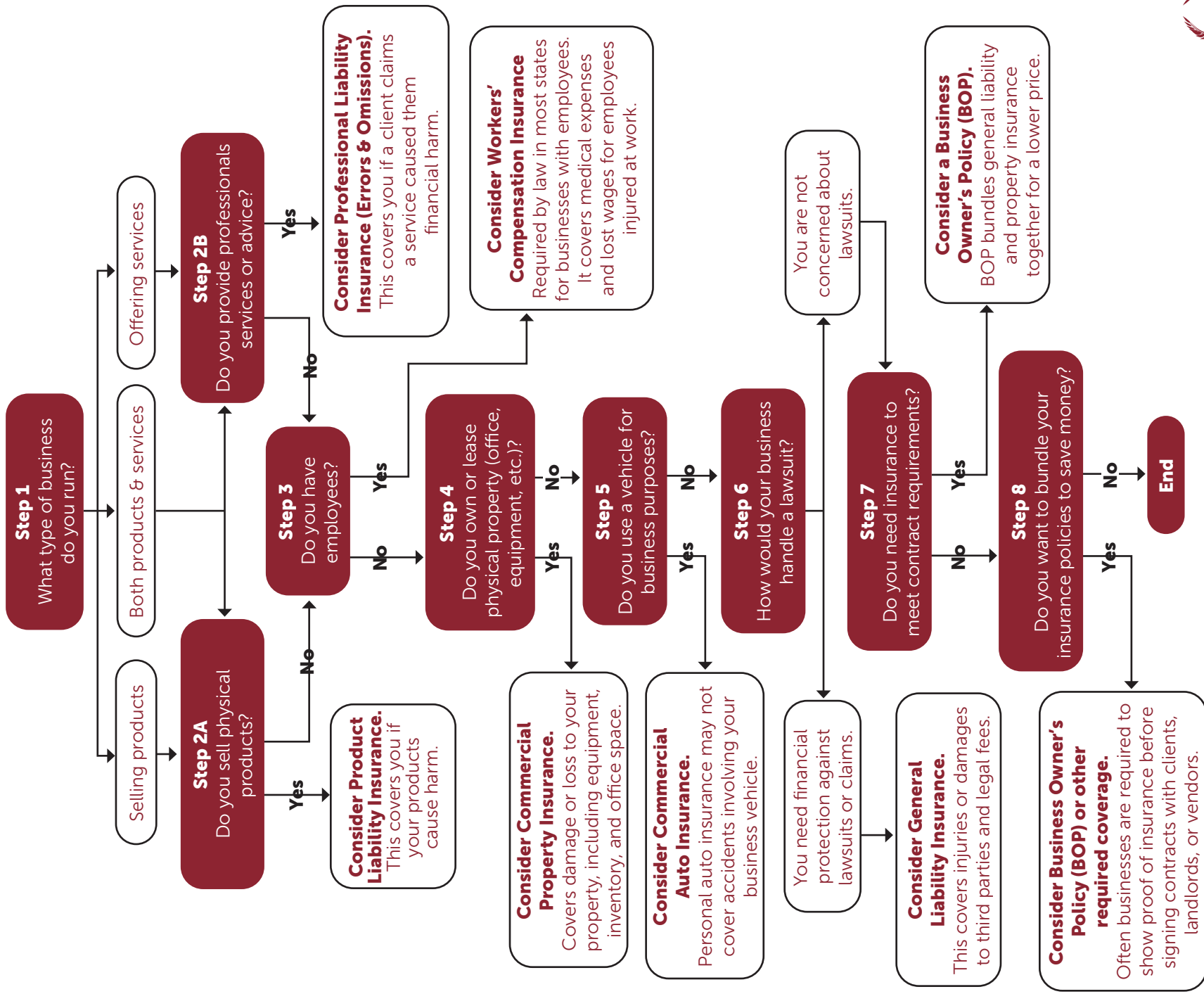
- *Next Insurance* – Tailored to small businesses with fast online quotes and flexible coverage options. Especially good for sole proprietors, contractors, and home-based businesses.
- *The Hartford* – A long-established provider offering comprehensive coverage packages and great customer service. Well-suited for businesses with employees or physical storefronts.
- *Hiscox* – Designed for freelancers, consultants, and digital businesses. They offer customizable plans and are known for ease of access and affordable premiums.

Common Types of Insurance to Consider

- *General Liability Insurance* – Protects against third-party bodily injury, property damage, and legal fees.
- *Professional Liability (Errors & Omissions)* – Covers you if a client claims your service caused them financial harm.
- *Workers' Compensation* – Required in many states if you have employees. Covers employee injuries on the job.
- *Commercial Property Insurance* – Protects physical assets like your storefront, office equipment, or inventory.
- *Business Owner's Policy (BOP)* – Combines general liability and property insurance at a lower bundled cost.

Business Insurance Decision Tree

Not sure what type of business insurance you need?
This decision tree walks you through key questions to help identify the types of coverage that may be right for your business.



Basic Accounting Tools

Keeping track of your business's finances is crucial to ensure you're staying on top of your income and expenses, preparing for tax season, and planning for growth. Whether you're just starting out or managing an established business, these tools can help you stay organized and save time.

Pro Tip: Set aside time each week to log receipts, check your cash flow, and review your financial status. Regular updates will keep you from scrambling at tax time, helping you maintain a clear picture of your financial health.



1. Wave

- Best For – Solo entrepreneurs or very small businesses.
- Features –
 - ◇ Free software to track income and expenses.
 - ◇ Invoicing and receipt scanning tools.
 - ◇ Integrated payments (credit card, bank transfer, etc.)
 - ◇ Financial reports to help with tax prep.
- Why Choose Wave – It's free, user-friendly, and provides everything you need to get started with basic accounting tasks without any upfront costs. Great for freelancers, consultants, or anyone just beginning their business journey.

2. Mint

- Best For – Individuals or small business owners who want to keep an eye on both their personal and business finances in one place.
- Features –
 - ◇ Syncs with your bank and credit card accounts.
 - ◇ Tracks spending and categorizes your expenses.
 - ◇ Budgeting tools and financial goal setting.
- Why Choose Mint – While primarily designed for personal finance, Mint is helpful for side hustles or small business owners who operate on a limited budget. It's great for tracking day-to-day spending, and it's free.

3. QuickBooks

- Best For – Small to medium-sized businesses looking for scalability as they grow.
- Features –
 - ◇ Expense tracking, invoicing, and payroll management.
 - ◇ Tax filing tools and year-end reports.
 - ◇ Customizable financial reports (Profit & Loss, Balance Sheet, etc.)
 - ◇ Integration with bank accounts and credit cards.
 - ◇ Mobile app for on-the-go tracking.
- Why Choose QuickBooks – QuickBooks is a widely-used accounting tool that offers a comprehensive solution for small businesses. It's suitable for those looking to expand beyond basic bookkeeping, and it offers a variety of plans to grow with your business.

4. Hiring a Bookkeeper or CPA

- Best For – Growing businesses or those with complex finances.
- Why Choose This –
 - ◇ As your business grows, keeping track of finances might become too overwhelming or time-consuming.
 - ◇ A bookkeeper or CPA can help manage payroll, prepare taxes, provide financial advice, and ensure that you're maximizing deductions.
 - ◇ Hiring a professional gives you more time to focus on running your business while they ensure your finances are in order.

"If you have a dream, CWE will help you fulfill it."

- Jessica DeLeon, SoloList/JDL Communications LLC

Taxation

When starting a business, be sure to identify your federal, state, and local tax obligations. Consulting an accountant or attorney can help ensure you understand and meet all your tax responsibilities.

Federal Taxes: The IRS is the nation's tax collection agency.



Find the right forms for your type of business.

State Taxes: The Comptroller of Public Accounts (CPA) is charged with the administration and collection of various state taxes.

- Texas imposes a sales and use tax on all retail sales, leases, and rentals of goods and services that are expressly enumerated as taxable under the Texas Tax Code.
- The Texas Comptroller also administers the franchise tax, which is imposed on each taxable entity that is chartered or organized in Texas or is doing business in Texas. However, most small businesses are exempt.

Unemployment Tax: The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) administers the Unemployment Tax program in Texas. Most employers are required to pay Unemployment Insurance (UI) tax under certain circumstances. TWC uses three employment categories: regular, domestic, and agricultural. Employer tax liability differs for each type of employment.

Manufacturing & Supply Chain

If your business involves making or distributing physical products, you'll need to think about manufacturing and logistics.

- *TMAC (Texas Manufacturing Assistance Center)* – A statewide resource that helps small manufacturers become more efficient, sustainable, and competitive.



Pro Tip: Reach out early — even a consultation can save you money or prevent costly mistakes down the road.

Time Management & Work-Life Balance

As an entrepreneur, balancing the demands of running a business with personal life can be a challenge, especially for women who often take on caregiving roles.

Here are some strategies to help you manage your time and prevent burnout:

- *Time-Blocking* – Set aside specific time blocks for different tasks (e.g., one hour for emails, two hours for client work). This keeps you focused and prevents work from bleeding into your personal life.
- *Use Productivity Tools* – Tools like Trello (for task management), Notion (for project tracking), or Asana (for team collaboration) can help you stay organized and on top of priorities.
- *Delegate When Possible* – Don't hesitate to delegate tasks that others can handle, like bookkeeping or social media management, to free up your time for bigger decisions.
- *Prioritize Self-Care* – Remember that taking care of yourself is crucial to the long-term health of your business. Schedule regular breaks, exercise, and hobbies to recharge.

"Without the support of CWE, I'm not sure if my business would have achieved it's current success as quickly as it did."

– **Dr. Catina Miller, Mindful Wellness Reset: Relax, Release & Renew, PLLC**

Certification and Legal Support

Navigating the legal landscape and obtaining the right certifications can open powerful doors for women-owned businesses. From accessing government contracts to building legitimacy with corporate buyers, these tools not only offer protection, they offer opportunity.

Certifications help your business stand out especially when pursuing contracts with large corporations, government agencies, or nonprofits that have supplier diversity goals. Some certifications also make you eligible for grant programs, mentorships, and business development resources.

Commonly Used Certifications

Certification	Certifying Body	Who it's For	Key Benefits	Cost	Validity
WBE (Women's Business Enterprise)	Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) or state/local entities	Women-owned, for-profit businesses (51%+ owned and controlled by women)	Access to corporate supplier diversity programs, national networking events, mentorship, and matchmaking	Varies (\$350–\$1,250 via WBENC based on revenue; some local versions are free)	1 year (renewable)
HUB (Historically Underutilized Business – Texas)	Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts	Women-, minority-, or service-disabled veteran-owned businesses based in Texas	Access to state contracts; increased visibility on Texas' vendor databases; support from procurement offices	Free	4 year
WOSB / EDWOSB (Women-Owned Small Business / Economically Disadvantaged WOSB)	U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)	Women-owned small businesses looking to do business with the federal government	Eligible for set-aside federal contracts; priority in competitive bids; access to SBA resources	Free (self-certification) or via third-party (fee-based)	1 year (renewable)

To learn more about each certification and how to apply, visit the certifying body's website, ask your local SBDC, or email cwe@twu.edu for clarification on each agency.

Where to Get Certified

These organizations offer certification, guidance, and often host events and training for women-owned businesses:

- *Women's Business Council – Southwest (WBCS)*
Administers WBENC certifications and supports women-owned businesses in 160 Texas counties.
- *Women's Business Enterprise Alliance (WBEA)*
WBENC certification in 94 Texas counties.
- *Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts*
Provides HUB certification for Texas-based disadvantaged or minority-owned businesses.
- *SBA Certify Program*
Offers certification for WOSB/EDWOSB to compete for federal contracts.
- *Texas HUB Directory*
Where HUB-certified businesses can be found by government buyers.

Legal Support for Entrepreneurs

Legal questions come up at every stage of business — from choosing a business structure to protecting intellectual property. These trusted resources can help you navigate them affordably or even at no cost.

Affordable & Pro Bono Legal Help

- *Texas Law Help* – Free, statewide resource with legal guides, forms, and access to attorneys.
- *Dallas Volunteer Attorney Program* – Free legal clinics for low-income business owners.
- *SMU Small Business Legal Clinic* – Offers legal support for business formation, contracts, trademarks, and more.
- *Baylor Entrepreneurship Legal Clinic* – Assists Texas entrepreneurs with early-stage legal needs.

Other Legal Tools to Explore

- *LegalZoom* – Offers affordable legal documents and business formation services.
- *State Bar of Texas* – Find licensed lawyers and business-related legal resources.
- *Texas Accountants and Lawyers for the Arts* – Especially useful for creatives, artists, and innovators.

Protecting Your Ideas

Your business is more than your products or services — it's also your brand, ideas, and creative work. Intellectual property (IP) helps protect the things that make your

business unique. Whether you're creating content, building a brand, or developing a new product, understanding IP is crucial.

Common Types of Intellectual Property

Trademarks – A trademark protects names, logos, slogans, and other branding elements that identify your business. For example, your business name or your product packaging design can be trademarked to prevent others from using something confusingly similar. Trademarks help build brand recognition and prevent others from copying your identity.

- Where to register: U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO)

Copyrights – Copyright protects original creative works like written content, designs, music, photography, videos, and websites. As soon as your work is created and in a fixed form (like written down or published), it's automatically protected by copyright — but registering it gives you stronger legal rights. If you produce original marketing content, blogs, ebooks, or artwork, copyright ensures your work isn't used without permission.

- Where to register: U.S. Copyright Office

Patents – Patents protect inventions, such as new machines, processes, or product designs. This is most relevant for entrepreneurs developing physical products or technology. A patent gives you exclusive rights to make, use, or sell your invention for a set period of time — typically 20 years.

- Where to register: U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO)

Tips for Entrepreneurs

1. *Start with a name search* – Before printing business cards or launching a website, search your business name in the trademark database and check if the web domain is available.
2. *Use ™ and © symbols* – Even if you're not registered yet, you can use "™" next to your brand name or slogan and "©" with your original content as a first layer of protection.
3. *Keep records* – Save drafts, files, and dates for all original content or designs — this helps prove ownership if needed.
4. *Know when to call a lawyer* – For complex inventions or national branding plans, consider consulting an intellectual property attorney or legal clinic (many offer free consultations for small businesses).

Marketing, Branding and Online Presence

Strong branding and an online presence aren't just "nice to have" — they are essential for reaching your customers, building trust, and standing out in today's crowded marketplace. Whether you're running a product-based or service-based business, this is how you connect, communicate, and convert.

Branding Basics

Your brand is more than your logo—it's your identity. Think of it as your business's personality, voice, and promise to your customers.

Start Here

- *Define Your Mission, Vision & Values* – What do you stand for?
- *Identify Your Ideal Customer* – Who are you trying to reach?
- *Choose Your Voice & Tone* – Friendly and fun? Professional and polished?
- *Design Visual Assets* – Consistent logo, colors, fonts.

Tools

- *Canva Brand Kit* – Great for creating and storing brand templates.
- *Looka* – AI-powered logo and branding package builder.
- *Coolers* – Create and test color palettes.

Building Your Online Presence

A website and active online profiles help you get discovered and build credibility. Think of them as your digital storefront and networking space.

Must-Haves for Your Site

- *Clear business description and value proposition* – In the first few seconds visitors should know what you offer, who it's for, and what makes it valuable or different. Place this prominently on your homepage and repeat it on social media bios and printed materials.

- *Contact info and/or lead form* – Make it easy for people to reach you by listing your email, phone number, or business location (and hours of operation, if applicable). You can also add a contact form so customers can send questions or service requests directly from your site.
- *Social media links* – Your website and social profiles should work together. Include icons or links to Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, TikTok, Pinterest, or YouTube. Place them in your website footer or top navigation bar for visibility.
- *Portfolio, testimonials, or product listings* – Build trust by showing examples of your work or satisfied customers through photos of past projects or products, customer testimonials (written or video), and service menus or product descriptions with pricing. Even one or two strong testimonials can help reassure new visitors.
- *SEO Basics (Search Engine Optimization)* – Help people find your website on Google by using clear headings, including keywords customers might search, and writing short descriptions for each page (called meta descriptions) with important phrases. Include alt-text for images and page titles with keywords.

Website Builders

- *Wix* – Great for entrepreneurs who want full design flexibility and are comfortable spending a little time customizing their site. Think photographers, event planners, boutiques, or beauty professionals.
- *Weebly* – Great for business owners who want a quick, no-frills website they can launch in a weekend. Ideal for food trucks, local service providers, or solo consultants.
- *UENI* – Great for busy entrepreneurs who don't have time or interest in building a site themselves but still want something polished and professional. Especially helpful for home-based businesses, solo practitioners, or those starting with limited tech experience.
- *Shopify* – Great for founders who sell products online and want to create their own store.

Pro Tip: Claim your Google Business Profile to help customers find you in local search results.

Email Marketing

Email is one of the most budget-friendly marketing tools out there, but only if it's done with purpose. While it's true that many people ignore promotional emails, the right message to the right audience at the right time can make a big impact. Even if your emails aren't always opened, they keep your name in front of your audience — which can matter the next time they're ready to buy, recommend, or collaborate.

Instead of sending frequent blasts, use email strategically to stay top-of-mind and build trust with your audience over time.

Why Email Still Matters

- You own your email list (unlike social media followers).
- Emails can drive traffic to your website or sales page.
- Even low open rates can result in real revenue.
- A consistent presence builds long-term customer loyalty.

Smart Ways to Use Email Without Overwhelming Your Audience

1. *Monthly or Quarterly Newsletters* – Keep it short and valuable, highlight your latest products, upcoming events, or a tip relevant to your business.
2. *Welcome Email Series* – Automatically send a sequence of 2–3 short emails when someone signs up. Let them know what you do, who you help, and how to work with you.
3. *Lead Magnets (Freebies)* – Offer something useful (like a checklist, discount, or guide) in exchange for their email address. Just make sure it's something your ideal customer actually wants!
4. *Announce Something Exciting* – Got a new product, event, or grant win? Send one well-designed email to let your subscribers know. Even if only 20% open it, that's still dozens or hundreds of warm leads.

Email Marketing Do's and Don'ts

Do's

Build your list ethically

Always get permission before adding someone to your list. Use signup forms, event registrations, or freebies to collect emails.

Send emails consistently

Whether it's monthly, biweekly, or tied to promotions — make a plan and stick to it.

Use a branded email address

Sending from you@yourbusiness.com looks more professional than a Gmail or Yahoo address.

Offer something of value

Discounts, tips, early access, how-to guides — give your audience a reason to open.

Write like a human

Be clear and conversational. You're talking to a person, not a crowd.

Test before you send

Preview your email and send yourself a test — especially on mobile!

Make unsubscribing easy

It's not personal — it's respectful and required by law (CAN SPAM Act)

Don'ts

Don't buy or scrape email lists

It's against the law and usually results in your emails going straight to spam.

Don't overload with text or images

Keep it short, scannable, and focused. One email = one message.

Don't send without a purpose

Every email should have a clear reason — an update, an offer, a request.

Don't forget your call to action

What do you want the reader to do? Click, reply, RSVP, or buy?

Don't ignore your metrics

Open rates, click rates, and unsubscribes help you improve next time.

Don't try to sound like a big corporation

Your personal voice is a strength — especially in a local or niche business.

Don't share your email list

Selling or transferring a list without explicit consent from the recipients violates their privacy and can lead to legal issues.

Top Email Platforms

- *MailerLite* – Clean design, generous free plan, intuitive automation.
- *Mailchimp* – Widely used, drag-and-drop builder, good analytics.
- *Constant Contact* – Used by many SBDCs, strong customer support.



Social Media Strategy

You don't need to be on every platform to succeed. Focus your efforts where your audience already spends time and where your content feels natural to create. Be intentional, consistent, and strategic.

Top Platforms for Entrepreneurs

- *Instagram* – Best for visual products, personal brands, behind-the-scenes content.
- *Facebook* – Best for local businesses, community engagement, and events.
- *LinkedIn* – Best for service-based businesses, consulting, professional networking.
- *TikTok* – Best for creative, engaging short videos that show personality or product usage.

Tips for Strong Social Media Presence

1. *Start small and scale up* – Choose 1–2 platforms and build consistency before adding more.
2. *Create a content plan* – Decide on themes (ex: tips, behind-the-scenes, product features) and stick to a weekly posting rhythm.
3. *Focus on storytelling* – Share your journey as a founder. Talk about your “why,” your wins, and your challenges. People connect with real stories.
4. *Engage with your audience* – Respond to comments, ask questions, and follow relevant accounts in your space.
5. *Use hashtags wisely* – For discoverability, especially on Instagram and TikTok. Aim for a mix of niche, local, and trending tags.

6. *Measure what matters* – Track engagement (likes, shares, saves), not just followers. These show your content is resonating.

Tools to Make It Easier

- *Canva* – Design posts, stories, and flyers using templates. Easy to use and free to start.
- *CapCut* – Edit Reels and TikToks with music, captions, and effects.
- *Kapwing* – Add subtitles, resize videos, and edit online quickly.
- *Buffer or Later* – Schedule posts in advance so you can “batch” your content and free up time.

Customer Listening & Engagement

Your customers are constantly providing valuable feedback through reviews, social media comments, survey responses, and even their silence. Listening to your audience is a crucial part of refining your business strategy and stay relevant.

One simple way to stay informed is by setting up Google Alerts for your business name, industry keywords, or competitors. This free tool sends you updates when those terms appear in news articles, blogs, or websites, helping you stay on top of trends or reputation issues.

Additionally, tools like SurveyMonkey allow you to create and send custom surveys to your customers. This can help you understand their needs, test new ideas, or simply learn what's working and what's not.

Whether it's adjusting your product offerings, changing your hours, or responding to customer frustrations—staying engaged and responsive builds loyalty and helps you grow smarter. Don't wait for feedback to find you—actively seek it out and use it to shape your next move.

QUICK ACTION CHECKLIST

- ☒ **Create or update your brand kit**
- ☒ **Launch or refresh your website**
- ☒ **Claim your Google Business Profile**
- ☒ **Choose 1–2 social media platforms and commit to regular content**
- ☒ **Set up an email newsletter and grow your list**
- ☒ **Survey your customers at least twice a year**

Networking, Mentorship and Women-Specific Resources

No entrepreneur succeeds alone. Building a strong support system — through networking, mentorship, and targeted resources — can help you overcome challenges, grow faster, and stay inspired. As a woman entrepreneur, you have access to a growing number of programs designed to help you thrive.

The Power of Networking

Networking isn't just about handing out business cards. It's about cultivating genuine, mutually beneficial relationships that can lead to mentorship, referrals, partnerships, or simply valuable advice from someone who's been there before.

Strong networks provide support, fresh ideas, and even unexpected opportunities. As a woman entrepreneur, especially in underrepresented industries or communities, a strategic network can be one of your most powerful assets.

Start Local — Begin where you are. Look for opportunities to meet other business owners, potential clients, or resource providers in your own community.

- Chambers of Commerce often host mixers, breakfasts, or “business after hours” events. These are great for meeting established professionals and getting to know your local business landscape.
- Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), women's business centers, or local economic development agencies often host free or low-cost training sessions and networking mixers.
- Coworking spaces regularly offer community events or guest speaker panels.
- Check local universities, libraries, or city websites for business-related events and calendars.



Be Intentional — Before attending an event or scheduling a networking coffee, take a moment to define your purpose. Bring business cards, a simple pitch about who you are and what you do, and a willingness to listen as much as you talk. Great networking is rooted in curiosity and generosity. Ask yourself:

- Do I want to meet someone in my industry?
- Am I seeking referrals, partnerships, or vendors?
- Do I need moral support or inspiration from someone further along in their journey?

Follow Up with Purpose — The first conversation is just the beginning. Relationships grow through consistent, thoughtful follow-up.

- Send a short, friendly email or LinkedIn message within 1–2 days.
- Mention something specific from your conversation to personalize the message.
- Offer something helpful if you can — a link, a referral, or simply appreciation.
- Set a reminder to reconnect in a few weeks, especially if you discussed future collaboration.

“CWE is a hidden gem that every woman entrepreneur in Texas should know about. It's not just about funding or workshops, it's about having a real team behind you, rooting for your success, and guiding you with tools, knowledge, and compassion.”

– Cherie Turner, Mommy Scrubs

Networking & Mentorship Tracker

Building a business is easier with the right people in your corner. Keep a simple spreadsheet or notes app of mentors, peers, and professional connections who support your entrepreneurial journey. Revisit this section regularly to reflect, follow up, and build meaningful relationships.

Professional Contacts Log Use this to remember who you met, where, and how they might be helpful to your business.	
Name:	
Role/Title:	
Organization:	
Where We Met:	
Reason to Follow Up:	
Contact Info:	
Next Steps or Follow-Up Date:	
Mentorship Notes A place to jot down key advice or lessons learned from mentors.	
Mentor Name:	
Area of Expertise:	
How We Connected:	
Most Helpful Advice So Far:	
Next Steps:	
Additional Notes:	
Events & Networking Groups to Explore Keep track of groups or gatherings that could expand your circle and your knowledge.	
Event or Group Name:	
Date & Location:	
Type (e.g., networking, training, support group):	
Key People to Meet or Follow Up With:	
Notes or Impressions:	

Mentorship: Guidance That Grows with You

Mentorship is one of the most powerful tools for personal and business growth. A mentor can help you avoid common mistakes, think more strategically, and stay motivated when the journey gets tough. The right mentor won't give you all the answers, but they will ask the right questions and challenge you to grow with confidence.

Why Mentorship Matters

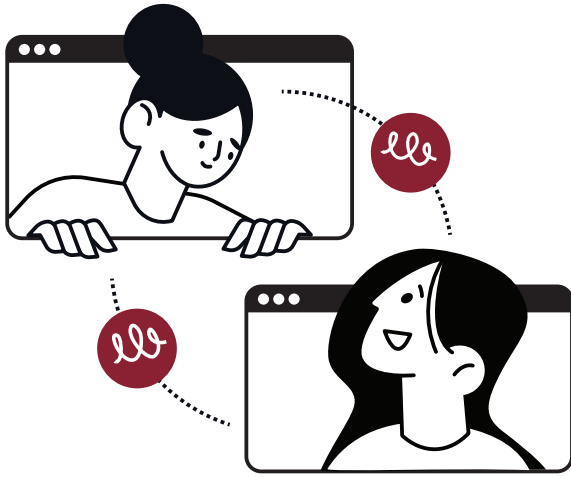
Whether you're navigating your first business launch or preparing to scale, mentorship provides:

- *Guidance* – Mentors share insights from real-world experience.
- *Accountability* – Regular check-ins help you stay focused on your goals.
- *Encouragement* – Entrepreneurship can be isolating; mentors provide emotional support and perspective.
- *Expanded Networks* – Many mentors can introduce you to resources, clients, or collaborators you wouldn't have met otherwise.

Where to Find a Mentor

You don't have to wait for someone to tap you on the shoulder. Today, there are structured and informal ways to find mentorship at every stage of business:

1. *Center for Women Entrepreneurs (CWE)* – Offers business advising and programs specifically designed to support Texas women.
2. *SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives)* – Offers free, confidential business mentoring, often from retired professionals with deep industry experience.
3. *Local SBDCs and Women's Business Centers* – Many provide formal mentorship pairings or advising sessions.
4. *Industry groups or trade associations* – These often include mentorship programs or networking events.
5. *Informal mentorship* – Consider peers who are a few steps ahead of you, professors, past supervisors, or successful entrepreneurs in your community. Reach out with a specific ask or an offer to connect over coffee.



Tips for Building Mentoring Relationships

Start with a specific ask. Rather than “Will you be my mentor?”, try “Could I schedule 20 minutes to ask about your experience in scaling your business?”

- *Be prepared* – Bring questions, challenges, or updates to every meeting.
- *Respect their time* – Mentors are often busy professionals. Be punctual, concise, and appreciative.
- *Be open to feedback* – Great mentors challenge you. Approach every conversation with humility and curiosity.
- *Give back* – Even as a mentee, you can offer gratitude, referrals, insights, or introductions.

Pro Tip: Make the First Move

Women-Specific Business Resources in Texas

Texas is home to a robust ecosystem of support for women entrepreneurs. These organizations offer everything from funding and education to community and exposure.

- *Center for Women Entrepreneurs (CWE)* – Offers grant programs, business advising and networking events for women across Texas.
- *National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO)* – A nationwide membership organization offering advocacy, events, leadership training, and mentorship. Local Texas chapters are active in major cities.
- *Women’s Business Centers (WBCs)* – Federally funded resource hubs that offer counseling, training, and access to capital specifically for women entrepreneurs.
- *The Tory Burch Foundation* – Supports women with access to capital, fellowships, education, and digital resources. Great for emerging entrepreneurs with a strong social mission.
- *Ladies Who Launch* – A nonprofit focused on funding, mentorship, and community-building programs for women and nonbinary business owners.
- *Women’s Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC)* – Offers certification, business opportunities, and events for women-owned businesses looking to work with large corporations or government contracts.

These resources are powerful, but they won’t come knocking on your door. Visit their websites, subscribe to newsletters, attend a virtual info session, or apply for a program. Many entrepreneurs say the biggest breakthroughs in their business came from simply showing up to the right room — these organizations are a great place to start.

“CWE is so much more than a professional resource – it’s a community of women who uplift, equip, and cheer each other on.”

- Tiffany Henry, Cool Crayations

Learning and Skill Building

Success in business isn't just about having a great idea, it's about continuously learning, adapting, and improving. Investing in your own development is one of the smartest moves you can make. This section highlights accessible and high-impact ways to build your skills and knowledge base over time.

Pro Tip: Treat skill-building like a business task. Set aside an hour each week to read a book, take a course, or watch a tutorial. It's an investment in yourself — and your business.

Business Education

You don't need an MBA to run a successful business — but some structured learning can give you an edge. These programs offer practical, real-world education tailored for entrepreneurs:

- *Center for Women Entrepreneurs (CWE)* – The CWE offers free in person and virtual workshops and has over 100 training videos on their YouTube page.
- *SBA Learning Center* – Offers free online courses on marketing, financing, planning, and more.
- *Coursera & edX* – Host business courses from top universities (many are free to audit). Look for topics like small business strategy, digital marketing, and accounting.
- *Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Program* – A selective but free program offering business education, support services, and networking. Great for growth-minded entrepreneurs.

Skills to Focus On

Entrepreneurs wear many hats. Here are a few foundational skills that can significantly impact your confidence and success:

1. *Financial literacy* – Understanding profit margins, cash flow, and basic accounting.
2. *Digital marketing* – Knowing how to attract customers online using social media, SEO, and email campaigns.
3. *Sales & negotiation* – Being able to confidently pitch your product or service and close deals.
4. *Project management* – Organizing tasks, setting timelines, and following through efficiently.
5. *Leadership* – Communicating clearly, setting goals, and managing people as your business grows.



Ongoing Learning Strategies

You don't have to go it alone — or go back to school — to stay sharp:

- *Podcasts & YouTube channels* – Learn on the go from successful entrepreneurs and industry experts.
- *Books* – Try *Lean In* by Sheryl Sandberg, *In the Company of Women* by Grace Bonney, or *We Should All Be Millionaires* by Rachel Rodgers.
- *Local libraries or university small business centers* – Many offer free access to business databases, workshops, and mentoring.

From Vision to Venture

Success in business isn't just about having a great idea. Launching and growing a business takes courage, creativity, and resilience — qualities you already possess. This guide is designed to give you a head start, but remember: you don't have to have everything figured out to get started. Progress happens when you take small, consistent steps forward.

Whether you're refining your business plan, building your brand, or preparing for your first big pitch, know that you're not alone. Across Texas and beyond, a network of resources, mentors, and women entrepreneurs are here to support you.

Let this guide be your roadmap. Come back to it as your business evolves. Ask questions. Seek community. Stay curious. And above all, trust yourself — your ideas matter, and so does the journey you're on.

**Your venture begins with your vision.
You're already on your way.**



TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

**JANE NELSON INSTITUTE
for WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP**

Center for Women Entrepreneurs

940.898.2895 | CWE@twu.edu
twu.edu/center-women-entrepreneurs
linktr.ee/twucwe



WUCWE



Index

A.

Accounting 8

B.

Branding 12
Bank Account 3
Business Formation 2
Business Plan 2
Business Structure 3

C.

Certifications 10-11
CDFIs (Community
Development Financial
Institutions) 5
Communication 6
Copyrights 11
Customer Engagement 14

E.

Education 18
Email Marketing 13
Equity Funding 5

F.

Federal EIN 3

G.

Google Alerts 14
Grants for Women
Entrepreneurs 4

I.

Insurance 6-7
Investment Capital 5

L.

Legal Support 11

M.

Manufacturing 9
Mentorship 16-17

N.

Networking 15-16

P.

Patents 11
Payment Platforms 6, 8
Pricing 5

R.

Register Your Business 3

S.

Skill Building 18
Small Business Loans 5
Social Media 12, 14
Surveys 14

T.

Taxes 9
Time Management 9
Trademarks 11

W.

Wages 5
Website 12



Visions into Ventures



July 2025