Clara Vista BOOKKEEPING

Ohio New Business Startup Checklist

Every registration, license, and account — in the right order.

STEP 1: MAKE IT OFFICIAL

Do these in order — each step needs the one before it.

- [ ] **Choose your business structure**
  An LLC is the most common choice for new Ohio businesses. Once you're profitable, talk to a professional about an S-corp election — it can save real money.

- [ ] **File Articles of Organization with the Ohio Secretary of State**
  $99 filing fee, filed online at OhioSoS.gov. Standard processing usually takes about a week or less; paid expedited options are available if you're in a hurry.

- [ ] **Get your EIN from irs.gov**
  This is your business's federal tax ID. It's free and takes about 10 minutes online — never pay a website for this.

- [ ] **Check name availability & register any trade name (DBA)**
  Search your name on the Secretary of State's website before you fall in love with it. If you'll do business under a different name, register that trade name too.

STEP 2: MONEY SETUP

Do this before your first sale — not after.

- [ ] **Open a dedicated business checking account**
  Mixing personal and business money is the #1 rookie mistake we clean up. One account, business only, from day one.

- [ ] **Get a business credit or debit card**
  Every business expense on one card means clean records — and no digging through personal statements at tax time.

- [ ] **Set up accounting software from day one**
  It's far easier to start clean than to rebuild a year of records later. Our QBO discount link gets you 30% off — it's on this same resources page.

- [ ] **Decide how you'll pay yourself**
  For most LLC owners that's an owner's draw. Pick an amount and a rhythm, then keep it consistent — your books (and your budget) will thank you.

STEP 3: TAXES & REGISTRATIONS

This is where new owners get surprised.

- [ ] **Get a vendor's license if you sell taxable goods or services**
  $50 one-time fee (it went up from $25 in April 2025). Register through the Ohio Business Gateway — online applications are often approved the same day.

- [ ] **Understand the Ohio Commercial Activity Tax (CAT)**
  Only businesses with more than $6 million in Ohio gross receipts have to register and pay. Most new businesses are well under it — but know the number.

- [ ] **Check your city's municipal income tax rules**
  Cincinnati taxes business profits at 1.8%, and most Ohio cities have their own version. This one surprises everyone — check the rules where you work and where you live.

- [ ] **Set aside money for taxes from the first dollar**
  Nobody withholds taxes for you now. Rule of thumb: move 25–30% of profit into a separate savings account so tax season is a bill, not a crisis.

STEP 4: IF YOU'RE HIRING

Do these before the first hire — not after.

- [ ] **Register with Ohio BWC for workers' comp BEFORE the first hire**
  Ohio requires coverage from an employee's very first day. Apply at bwc.ohio.gov — the application fee starts at $120.

- [ ] **Set up payroll properly**
  Payroll mistakes are the most expensive kind — missed filings and penalties add up fast. This one is genuinely worth professional help.

- [ ] **Report new hires to the Ohio New Hire Reporting Center**
  Within 20 days of the start date, at oh-newhire.com. Independent contractors you pay $2,500+ per year must be reported too.

- [ ] **Understand W-2 vs. 1099**
  Calling an employee a contractor to save money is a time bomb. If you control when, where, and how they work, they're probably an employee.

Current as of mid-2026. Fees and thresholds change — verify at the linked agencies or ask us. General guidance, not legal or tax advice.