



AUSTIN FOUNDERS FEED

Small Business Week Guide

May 4–8, 2026 · Austin, TX

The sessions, resources, and events actually worth your time.

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Your Week at a Glance

Austin Small Business Week is packed with free workshops, panels, and networking sessions. Most of it is genuinely useful. But there are 15+ events across five days, and nobody has time for all of them.

We went through the full schedule and pulled the sessions we think are most worth your time — whether you're raising money, getting your first customers, or trying to avoid the mistakes that cost founders real money.

This is **not** an exhaustive list. It's a curated one. Here's how to pick what to attend:

Find your goal. Go to those sessions.

- **Need funding?** Jump to the capital sessions
- **Need more customers?** Go to the marketing and pricing sessions
- **Starting from scratch?** Hit the startup fundamentals workshops
- **Avoiding expensive mistakes?** Go to the legal, bookkeeping, and IRS sessions
- **Need a physical space?** Go to the permitting and lease sessions

If You Only Go to One Thing

[State of Small Business in Austin — The Economic Outlook in 2026](#)

Monday, May 4 · 9:00–11:00 AM

Norris Conference Center, Austin, TX · In Person

This is the best “big picture” session of the week. A panel of experts will break down how national, regional, and local economic forces are shaping the future of small businesses in Central Texas — including how AI is impacting operations, what it means for hiring and supply chains, and where the real growth opportunities are in 2026.

AFF Take: *It's also one of the strongest networking rooms of the week. Serious founders and business owners show up Monday morning. A light breakfast is included.*

Best for Funding

Microloans and Funding Paths for Small Businesses

Monday, May 4 · 11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Norris Conference Centers, Pecan-Cypress Rooms, Austin, TX · In Person

Probably the most immediately useful session of the week for early-stage founders. You'll get an introduction to Kiva's 0% interest microloans, then meet directly with local Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs). Learn what lenders look for, ask questions, and get practical guidance on preparing for financing — from microloans all the way up to traditional bank loans.

AFF Take: *If you liked the Kiva story in a recent AFF issue, this is the logical next step. Not every business is ready for traditional financing, and that's okay — this session meets you where you are.*

Explore Funding Options for Your Small Business

Tuesday, May 5 · 1:00–4:00 PM

5202 E Ben White Blvd, Suite 400, Austin, TX · In Person or Virtual (via Zoom)

★ **Eligible for the City of Austin Business Skills Certificate**

The broader capital class. Covers investors, crowdfunding, various lending options including Community Lending, and grants. You'll leave with a digital toolkit of resources to help you navigate your funding options.

AFF Take: *Best for founders still trying to figure out what kind of capital fits their business. Instructor: Julie Niehoff, Co-Founder & CMO of Distance Learning Media.*

Best for People Just Starting Out

[Starting or Rebuilding Your Own Small Business](#)

Tuesday, May 5 · 9:00 AM–12:00 PM

5202 E Ben White Blvd, Suite 400, Austin, TX · In Person or Virtual (via Zoom)

★ **Eligible for the City of Austin Business Skills Certificate**

The best starting-point session of the week. If you're in the "I know I want to do this, but I'm unclear on the actual steps" phase, this covers the paperwork, launch steps, and common mistakes you need to know. You'll also get a digital toolkit with templates, guides, and forms to support your journey.

AFF Take: *One of the most useful classes on the whole schedule for first-time founders. In-person is recommended for the networking, but virtual gives you full access to the content.*

[Write an Effective Business Plan Workshop](#)

Friday, May 8 · 10:00 AM–2:00 PM

5202 E Ben White Blvd, Suite 400, Austin, TX · In Person (limited virtual seats)

★ **Eligible for the City of Austin Business Skills Certificate**

Best for founders who need structure. This is a hands-on, four-hour workshop where you'll actually work on your own business plan using templates and free tools. Covers startup cost estimates, market analysis, and competitive evaluation. Includes a working lunch and group discussions. Instructor: Vicky Valdez, Professor of Entrepreneurship at ACC.

AFF Take: *This one is best experienced in person — you'll be actively building a plan, not just listening. Limited virtual seats available.*

Best for Getting More Customers

[Marketing 101: Building a Strong Brand](#)

Thursday, May 7 · 9:00 AM–12:00 PM

5202 E Ben White Blvd, Suite 400, Austin, TX · In Person or Virtual (via Zoom)

★ **Eligible for the City of Austin Business Skills Certificate**

Probably the best customer-acquisition session of the week. If your business has a “people don’t really know we exist” problem, this covers branding, logo and color palette basics, calls to action, taglines, messaging, tone, and how to position your business as the top choice for your target customer. Practical advice and free tools you can implement right away.

[The Psychology of Pricing and Negotiation](#)

Wednesday, May 6 · 6:00–9:00 PM

Virtual

★ **Eligible for the City of Austin Business Skills Certificate**

A strong sleeper pick. A lot of founders don’t have a lead problem — they have a pricing problem. This session walks you through the fundamentals of pricing and negotiation, with time for Q&A and a workbook you’ll use during class. You’ll also leave with a digital toolkit of templates, worksheets, and resources.

AFF Take: *If you’ve ever felt unsure whether you’re undercharging or negotiating poorly, this is one of the most practical sessions on the schedule. Also eligible for the Nonprofit Skills Certificate.*

[Getting Started with AI for Small Business](#)

Wednesday, May 6 · 9:00 AM–12:00 PM

Virtual

★ **Eligible for the City of Austin Business Skills Certificate**

A solid generalist pick for business owners, nonprofit professionals, and creatives who want to work smarter. You’ll get an accessible overview of AI applications you can implement at little to no cost — automating tasks, enhancing marketing, and generating content. Includes a toolkit of templates and resources. Instructor: Julie Niehoff.

Best for Avoiding Expensive Mistakes

[Worker Status Made Simple: Employee or Independent Contractor](#)

Wednesday, May 6 · 9:30–11:30 AM

Virtual

One of the highest-ROI sessions on the schedule if you're hiring. Misclassifying workers can mean back taxes, penalties, and lawsuits. This session gives you clear answers about what sets each role apart, what tax duties come with each, and how to avoid compliance problems. Quick, focused, and immediately useful.

[Intro to Bookkeeping for Small Business](#)

Thursday, May 7 · 1:00–4:00 PM

5202 E Ben White Blvd, Suite 400, Austin, TX · In Person or Virtual (via Zoom)

★ Eligible for the City of Austin Business Skills Certificate

A clear introduction to the basics of bookkeeping: how to organize your records and manage your finances effectively. This session also serves as a prerequisite for the full-day hands-on bookkeeping workshop, so it's a smart first step if you're serious about getting your finances right.

[Empower Your Small Business: IRS Resources You Need](#)

Friday, May 8 · 9:30–11:30 AM

Virtual

Not glamorous, but potentially very useful. Learn which IRS online tools are most helpful, how to use them, what records you need to keep, and how to avoid common tax mistakes. Practical tips you can use right away to stay organized and confident all year.

AFF Take: *The kind of thing you'll thank yourself for attending six months from now.*

Best for Physical Businesses & Real Estate

[The Commercial Permitting and Development Process: From Start to Finish](#)

Wednesday, May 6 · 10:00–11:00 AM

5202 E Ben White Blvd, Suite 400, Austin, TX · In Person

If you're opening, renovating, or building out a commercial space in Austin, this is one of the most useful sessions on the schedule. You'll learn where to start with permitting requirements, how to streamline your project planning, and how to navigate the process with confidence.

[What to Know Before You Buy or Lease](#)

Wednesday, May 6 · 11:30 AM–12:30 PM

5202 E Ben White Blvd, Suite 400, Austin, TX · In Person

A strong practical follow-up to the permitting session. Learn how to spot red flags before signing a lease or purchasing commercial property. Good for founders and business owners who want to make informed decisions and protect their investment.

[One-on-Ones with Austin's Development Process Team](#)

Multiple dates throughout the week

5202 E Ben White Blvd, Suite 400, Austin, TX · In Person — By Appointment

This may be one of the best hidden resources on the whole schedule. Book a personalized appointment with Austin's Development Process Team. Discuss your proposed business, get connected to the right resources, and get project-specific guidance on permitting and development.

AFF Take: *Seriously, book one of these. Free one-on-one time with city development experts is rare, and it's almost always more valuable than a general class.*

Bonus: Sustainability-Minded Founders

[Circularity 101: A Hands-On Introduction to Sustainable Business Practices](#)

Wednesday, May 6 · 1:00–3:00 PM

5202 E Ben White Blvd, Suite 300, Austin, TX · In Person

A hands-on workshop on how circular economy strategies can cut waste, spark innovation, and strengthen your business. You'll learn how to spot hidden sources of waste, rethink design choices, and find new ways to operate more efficiently and sustainably. Practical, not preachy.

AFF Take: *Whether you're aiming to reduce your footprint, boost customer loyalty, or just operate with greater purpose. This one's worth the time.*

Most Underrated Session

[Discover the Benefits of Employee Ownership](#)

Wednesday, May 6 · 6:00–8:00 PM

Virtual · Presented in English with Spanish interpretation

Not for everyone, but easily the most interesting “non-obvious” session on the list. Learn what it means to be a values-focused business, explore the cooperative principles, and see examples of startup planning for employee-owned co-ops. Covers management structures, benefits, and challenges from launch to operation.

Our 5 Favorite Picks

If you can only make it to a handful of events this week, these are the five we'd circle:

1. [State of Small Business in Austin — The Economic Outlook in 2026](#)
2. [Microloans and Funding Paths for Small Businesses](#)
3. [Starting or Rebuilding Your Own Small Business](#)
4. [Marketing 101: Building a Strong Brand](#)
5. [The Psychology of Pricing and Negotiation](#)

All events are **free**. Register at [the Austin Small Business Week page on Eventbrite](#).

More Austin Founders Feed Guides

- **[The Networking Field Guide](#)** — How to turn every in-person event into sales and relationships. Get our best discount with code “NETWORKING”
- **[Startup Resources for Austin Founders](#)** — The comprehensive directory of local, state, and national resources for Austin builders (Free).
- **[Merchant Services 101](#)** — How to stop overpaying on payment processing and choose the right setup for your business (Free).
- **[How to Grow Your Business with LinkedIn](#)** — A practical guide for turning LinkedIn into a real growth channel.

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