

SEO Notes (for internal review — remove before publishing)

Title tag: DC Business Compliance Guide for Small Business Owners

Meta description: DC business licenses, taxes, and labor laws | Get the complete guide to staying compliant, with contacts, links, and free help.

Suggested URL slug: /dc-business-compliance-guide

Primary keyword: DC business compliance

Secondary keywords: DC business license, DC business taxes, DC paid family leave, register a business in DC, DC wage and hour law, small business resources DC

Suggested alt text: “Small business owner reviewing DC compliance requirements on a laptop” (if a header image is added)

Internal links to include: link to the Small Business Workshop Series recap/on-demand recordings page, and to the 2-minute feedback survey (if you’re doing the survey - DB needs to set this up)

External links to include: boss.dc.gov, dlcp.dc.gov, otr.cfo.dc.gov, dcpaidfamilyleave.dc.gov, does.dc.gov, ledcmetro.org, dc.gov/page/subscribe

DC Business Compliance: The Complete Guide for Small Business Owners

Running a small business in DC requires you to stay on top of a lot more than your day-to-day operations. Between business licenses, tax filings, employment law, and corporate paperwork, it's easy to lose track of what's due and when, especially when each requirement lives with a different DC agency.

This guide simplifies what you need all in one place: what each requirement covers, who to contact, and where to go for free help if you get stuck. It's built from the FAQs we heard most often during District Bridges' Small Business Workshop Series.

Why DC Business Compliance Matters

Falling behind on a filing or a license renewal isn't just paperwork headaches. It can mean fines, delayed permits, or losing your ability to legally operate. On the flip side, staying current keeps your business eligible for city contracts, grants, and financing programs that require good standing with DC agencies.

The good news: none of this has to be complicated once you know which office handles what.

Need help navigating DC requirements?

Keep these numbers handy for license, tax, filing, and workplace requirements:

- **Business Licenses & Registration (DLCP):** (202) 671-4500 | boss.dc.gov
- **Corporate Filings & BRA-25:** (202) 442-4432 | dlcp.dc.gov
- **Taxes (OTR):** (202) 727-4829 (4TAX) | otr.cfo.dc.gov
- **Paid Family Leave:** (202) 899-3700 | dcpaidfamilyleave.dc.gov
- **Wage & Hour:** (202) 671-1880 | does.dc.gov
- **Access to Capital (LEDC):** (202) 540-7400 | ledcmetro.org

Here's what each DC agency does:

Business Licenses & Registration

Most DC businesses need a Basic Business License (BBL) through the Department of Licensing and Consumer Protection (DLCP) before they can legally operate. The license type depends on your industry, so a retail shop, a restaurant, and a personal service business will each have different requirements.

Contact: (202) 671-4500 **Start here:** boss.dc.gov/

Corporate Filings & the Biennial Report (BRA-25)

If your business is registered as an LLC or corporation in DC, you're required to file a Biennial Report (Form BRA-25) with DLCP every two years to keep your registration active. Missing this filing can put your business into "not in good standing" status, which can affect everything from opening a bank account to bidding on contracts.

Contact: (202) 442-4432 **File here:** dlcp.dc.gov/

DC Business Taxes (Office of Tax and Revenue)

DC's Office of Tax and Revenue (OTR) handles business tax registration, sales tax, and franchise tax filings. If you're not sure which taxes apply to your business type, OTR's office is the place to start, and getting registered correctly from the beginning saves a lot of cleanup later.

Contact: (202) 727-4829 (4TAX) **Start here:** otr.cfo.dc.gov/

Employment Law: Paid Family Leave & Wage and Hour Rules

If you have employees in DC, two Department of Employment Services (DOES) programs apply to you directly:

Paid Family Leave

Funded through employer payroll contributions, this program gives DC workers paid time off for qualifying family and medical events. Employers are required to contribute and to post information about the program for employees.

Contact: (202) 899-3700 **Learn more:** dcpaidfamilyleave.dc.gov/

Wage and Hour

These rules set DC's minimum wage, overtime, and pay requirements. This is also the office to contact if you have questions about how DC's rules differ from federal wage and hour law.

Contact: (202) 671-1880 **Learn more:** does.dc.gov/

Access to Capital: Free Help from LEDC

Compliance is only part of the picture. Growing your business often means finding the right financing, and that is where the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC) comes in. LEDC offers free, one-on-one support for small business owners working through financing options, financial readiness, and loan applications, in the language you're most comfortable in.

Contact: (202) 540-7400 **Learn more:** ledcmetro.org/

Stay Ahead of Regulatory Changes

DC's business rules and requirements change more often than most business owners expect. Rather than finding out about a new regulation after the fact, you can sign up directly with DC government agencies to get updates on new laws, rules, and other changes that could affect your business. Not knowing is not an excuse to be noncompliant.

[Subscribe for DC Government Updates →](#)

Free Support from District Bridges

District Bridges' Small Business Workshop Series covers some of these topics, including dedicated Compliance Clinics with DC agency speakers, in both English and Spanish. Recordings from past sessions are available on demand, so you can watch and listen to the parts most relevant to your business whenever you need them.

[Watch the Small Business Workshop Series →](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need a business license to operate in DC?

Most businesses operating in DC need a Basic Business License through DLCP before opening. The specific license category depends on your business activity.

How often do I need to file the BRA-25 Biennial Report?

Every two years. Missing the deadline can move your business out of “good standing” with the District.

What is DC Paid Family Leave, and do I have to participate?

It's a program funded by employer payroll contributions that provides paid leave for qualifying family and medical events. Most DC employers are required to contribute.

Where can I get free help with financing or a business loan application?

LEDC provides free one-on-one support for DC small business owners navigating financing options and lender requirements.

How do I stay up to date about new DC business regulations before they take effect?

Subscribe directly to DC government agency updates at dc.gov/page/subscribe.

Have a question this guide didn't cover? Tell us what's making compliance harder for your business in our [2-minute survey](#), and we'll use it to guide future workshops and resources.