



# connections

An Immigrant's Guide to  
**Business Planning for  
Small Business  
in Alberta**



**BUSINESSLINK**  
Immigrant Services 



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# How to Use this Guidebook

## Welcome to Connections: An Immigrant's Guide to Business Planning for Small Business in Alberta

Are you ready to turn your new idea into a money-making business? Are you struggling to make money from your existing business? Are you frustrated by all the time it is taking to grow your business? Maybe you are trying to borrow money from banks or other lenders. Or maybe you are learning about being a professional entrepreneur. Whatever point your business is at, this guidebook will help you plan for it.

This guidebook will show you how to complete a business plan. You will use Business Link's Interactive Business Plan Builder (IBPB).

We suggest you read all the sections of this guide but take your time. This guide will introduce you to the business planning process. We recommend that you give yourself at least one day to work through each section and that you try the Activity Zone tasks before you move forward.

Try to learn each section in order. You may find there are topics you have experience in. We suggest you read every topic to understand the full business planning process.

### This guide also has some special features:



#### **DEFINITIONS**

Can help with certain vocabulary.



#### **CONNECTIONS**

Offer links and contacts that can help with the lesson.



#### **DID YOU KNOW**

Gives helpful hints and directions to useful resources.



#### **BUSINESS LINK**

Provides information about how Business Link can help you with your startup.



#### **ACTIVITY ZONE**

Gives extra opportunity to think about issues and ask yourself questions.

# SECTION 1

## An Introduction to Business Planning



A **PROCESS** is a series of actions or steps that lead to an end result.

**A great business idea is different from a great business. To turn a great idea into a great business the most important step is to plan.**

Setting goals and making plans are a daily routine for business owners. A business owner makes better decisions when they review everything happening in their business. A business owner will review how all the parts of their business are working together. A business plan shows all the [processes](#) in a business.

A business plan is like Google Maps. Google Maps gets us to where we want to go. It also updates as the world changes around us. A business plan does the same thing. A business plan lets you easily update where your business is going. It helps you check on your business environment and manage risk. A business plan is a management tool for you to use at any time. Just like Google Maps, a business plan will help you plan well.

It takes time and energy to create a big plan. The most common reason business owners do not plan at all is because they do not take the time to do it. You may be asking, “How do I create a plan and keep it up to date without wasting my time?”



This guide will show you three different types of business plans to use. Any of these business plans will help with either starting a business or managing an existing business. You will learn how to create a basic one-page **lean business plan** in 20 minutes or less. You will also learn about a visual plan called the **Business Model Canvas**. Both plans are easy to create and useful as a starting point.

The third type of business plan is the **traditional business plan**. You will use a traditional business plan for managing your business and for showing to lenders. A traditional business plan is a valuable document. You should write this plan early on in your business and update it as your business grows. This guide is designed to help you write a traditional business plan. Most businesses will need to get extra money from lenders at some point.

This guide works best with the Business Link Interactive Business Plan Builder (IBPB). Business Link has designed this interactive online business planner to help you write a traditional business plan. Sign up for the free planner online. Complete the online planner as you learn about each section. The online planner has tips and examples to help you. There are also boxes where you can enter your information. Short videos are available each step of the way.

## **LET'S GET STARTED!**

# SECTION 2

## The Difference Between a Business Idea and a Business...

A business idea is an idea you may have about offering a product or service for money.

Some examples of business ideas are:

“I would like to sell digital courses online.”

“I would like to start a drop shipping business.”

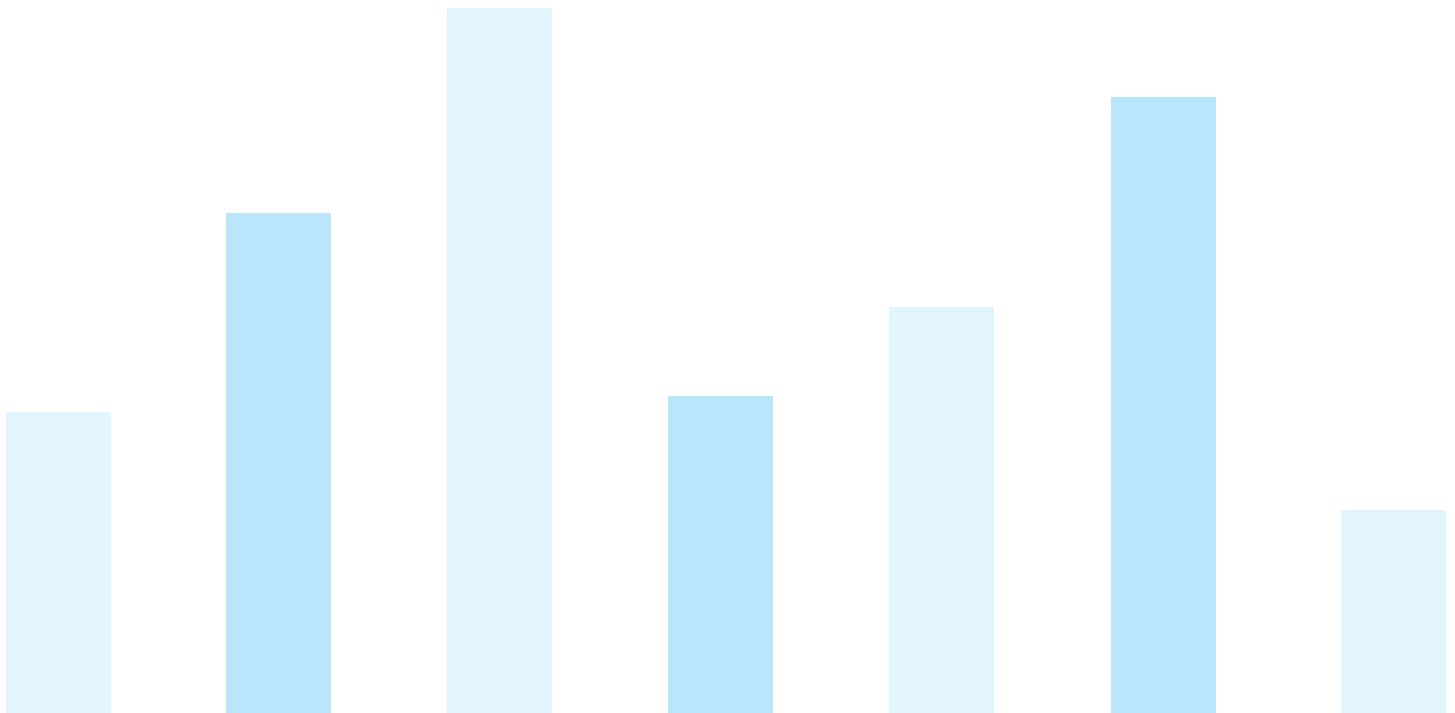
“I have created a new application that allows people to car share.”



Whether you have a business or are just starting one, write down your business idea in two sentences or less.

Now, let's start turning that idea into a business!

A business is a set of **processes** working together to generate money from the sale of products, services, or both.





It is important to understand the processes you need for your business idea. To help you identify the processes, complete the exercise below. Write one or two short sentences to answer each question. You can come back to your answers later to identify the processes used.

1. What problem will my business be solving?
2. What solution does my business offer?
3. Who is or might be an ideal customer<sup>1</sup> for my product or service?
4. What makes my business different from a competitor?
5. Will my business be online only, have a physical location, or both?
6. Who will be on my team? Just me? An Accountant or Bookkeeper? Contractors or employees?
7. If this is a new business, how will I finance my start-up costs? Will financing come from friends, family, personal savings? Loans or lines of credit?

**Congratulations!** By completing this exercise, you have created a basic one-page business plan. While this is a great start, it is not enough to satisfy bankers or other lenders. Bankers and lenders will ask for more details before they lend your business money. For now, you can use this one-page plan to help develop your idea further.



# SECTION 3

## Business Processes

A business is a set of processes working together to generate money from sale of products, services, or both. It is important to know some of the main processes to include in your plan.

**OPERATIONS PROCESSES** - Perhaps you are manufacturing a product. Maybe you are drop shipping items through an online store. You might be opening a restaurant. How do you get your product or service into the marketplace? How do you quality control your inventory items? How do you manage distribution and track materials? **Operations Processes** are the steps, or processes, you take to answer these questions.

**HUMAN RESOURCES PROCESSES (HR)** - How many people do you need for your company to function and manage all the operations? **Human Resources (HR) Processes** help to answer these questions.

**FINANCIAL PROCESSES** - How much money do you need? How do you know what price to charge for your products or services? How will you know how much money is flowing in and out of your company? **Financial Processes** are designed to answer these questions and many more.

**MARKETING PROCESSES** - Who are my competitors? How will I attract customers? Who will value my products and services enough to pay me? What is the best way to reach potential customers? Should I use social media, radio, brochures or other marketing materials? It is important to research your marketplace and understand **Marketing Processes**. Marketing processes help you make better decisions about marketing your business.

**EXECUTIVE PROCESSES** - What kind of business structure should I have? How do I work with partners and other team members? If I am the only person in charge of my business, what happens if I become sick or die? How do I manage my time with so much to do? These questions are for the everyday management of your business. **Executive Processes** are the processes you use to manage and lead your business.



Review your answers to the questions in Section Two. Match the processes you would use to some of your answers.



# SECTION 4

## Types of Business Plan

### Business Model Canvas

You can use your answers from Section Two to help you create a bigger plan. You can put all the information you have into a visual business plan known as the **Business Model Canvas (BMC)**.



The **BMC** is a great tool to help you visualize the many processes needed for your business. Learn

more about this type of plan by visiting the official [Business Model Canvas website](#)<sup>2</sup>.



Visit the [Business Link website](#)<sup>3</sup> for upcoming seminars on the Business Model Canvas and how to create a one-page visual plan using the templates and tools provided.



Learn more about creating a one-page **Lean Business Plan** by visiting the [Liveplan website](#)<sup>4</sup>.

Download the template. Use your answers from Section Two to find out if your idea will turn into a business.

### The Lean Business Plan

A **Lean Business Plan** is another simple one-page business plan. It is possible to write the Lean Business Plan in under 20 minutes. It is a fast and easy way to organize your business idea and get feedback before you write a full plan. The Lean Business Plan is very helpful if you have a few ideas but are not sure if they would work as a business. Before completing a full plan, you can identify key points to research further.

### Traditional Business Plan



The rest of this guide will help you create a traditional business plan using the online Interactive Business Plan Builder (**IBPB**) on the Business Link website. The **IBPB** has sample answers to the questions in each section. There are short videos in each section to help you. Before continuing with this guide, [sign up and create a profile](#)<sup>5</sup> online.

You will need the **traditional business plan** to get financing. It gives potential investors all the details they need. The details will help investors decide about financing your business. If you need financing, your lenders will want to see this plan. This type of plan will make you think about the processes in your business. Some processes may be working better than others.

A traditional plan helps you organize each business process to maximize profit.

# SECTION 5

## Working with the Interactive Business Plan Builder (IBPB)

There are many sections to the IBPB. Before you begin writing your plan, take time to read over each section. Become familiar with the tips and examples in each section. As you review each section, think about the answers from your one-page plan. See if there are areas where you can already enter a few ideas. You can complete the sections in any order. It is common practice to complete the Executive Summary at the very end.

You do not have to complete the plan right away. It may take a few days or weeks to do your research. When the plan is complete, all the sections will print in the correct order. You will be able to save the plan as a Word document or PDF. Remember, it is a **living document**. The answers you provide will change as your business grows. You can keep the document current by reviewing it every year and updating the information.



A **LIVING DOCUMENT** is a document that is updated and changed regularly.

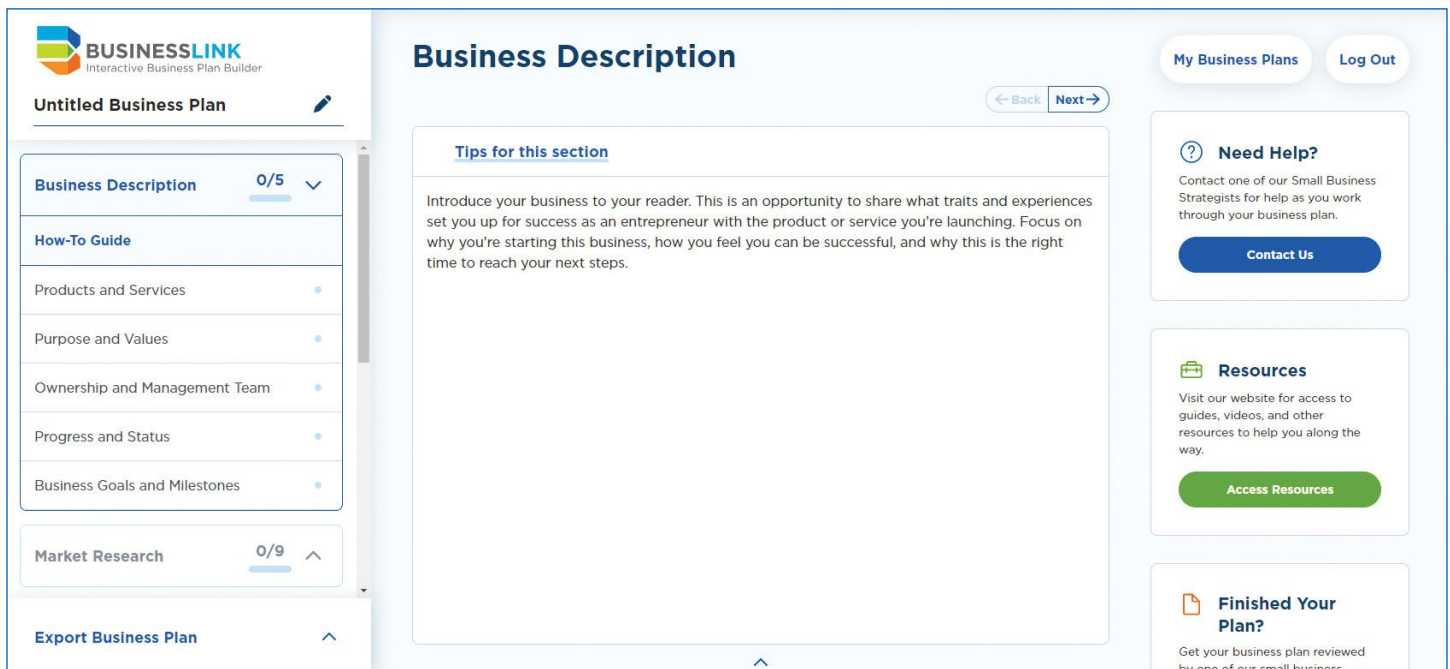
### Completing the IBPB

After logging in for the first time, you will be brought to a homepage where you can start a new business plan.

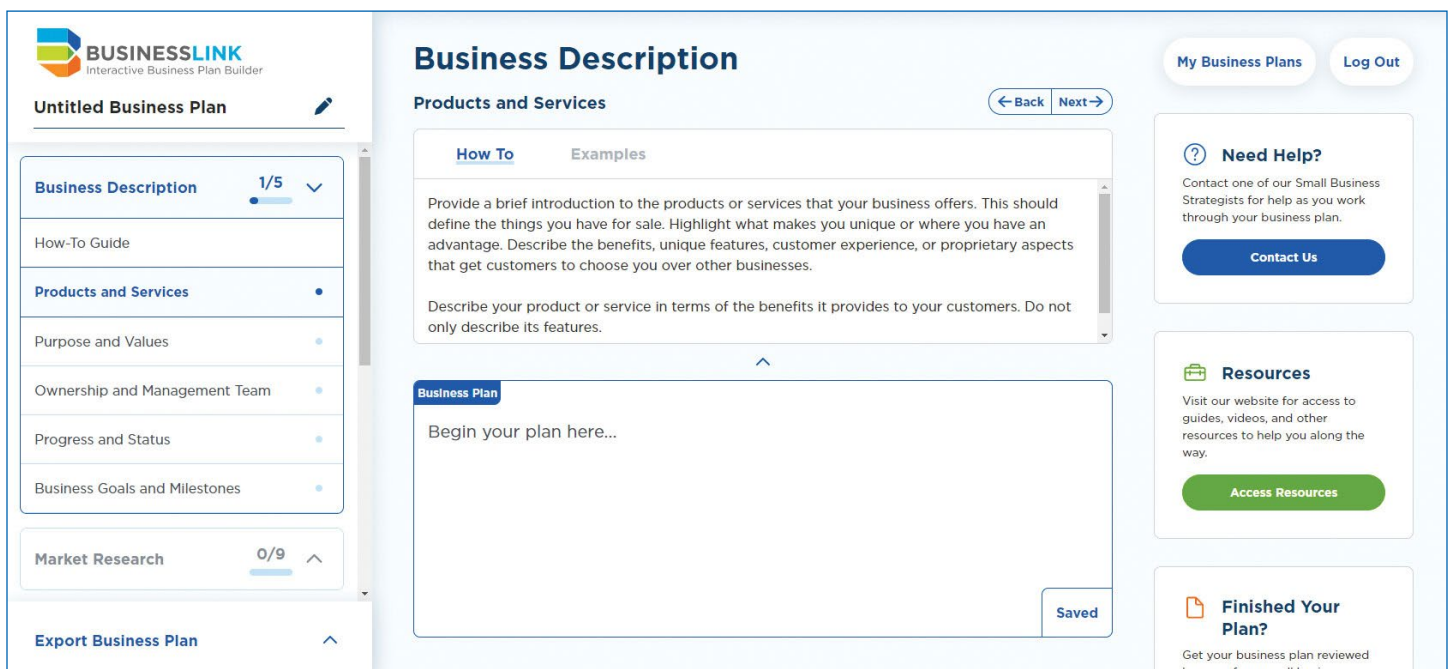
The screenshot shows the BusinessLink Interactive Business Plan Builder homepage. The header includes the BusinessLink logo and the text "Interactive Business Plan Builder". Below the header, the main heading is "My Business Plans". To the right of this heading is a button labeled "Create New Business Plan". The main content area is mostly blank, with a faint prompt "Create your first businessplan" centered. On the right side, there is a sidebar with three sections: "Need Help?" with a "Contact Us" button, "Resources" with an "Access Resources" button, and "Finished Your Plan?" with a "Learn More" button. At the top right of the sidebar, there are buttons for "My Business Plans" and "Log Out".



At the beginning of each section, you will be shown a How-To Guide which will help you learn more.



Once you go to the next page, you will be able to type in your business plan. Each subsection will have a How To tab and an Examples tab to guide you.





You can choose to complete any section in any order. We do recommend completing the plan in the following order though:

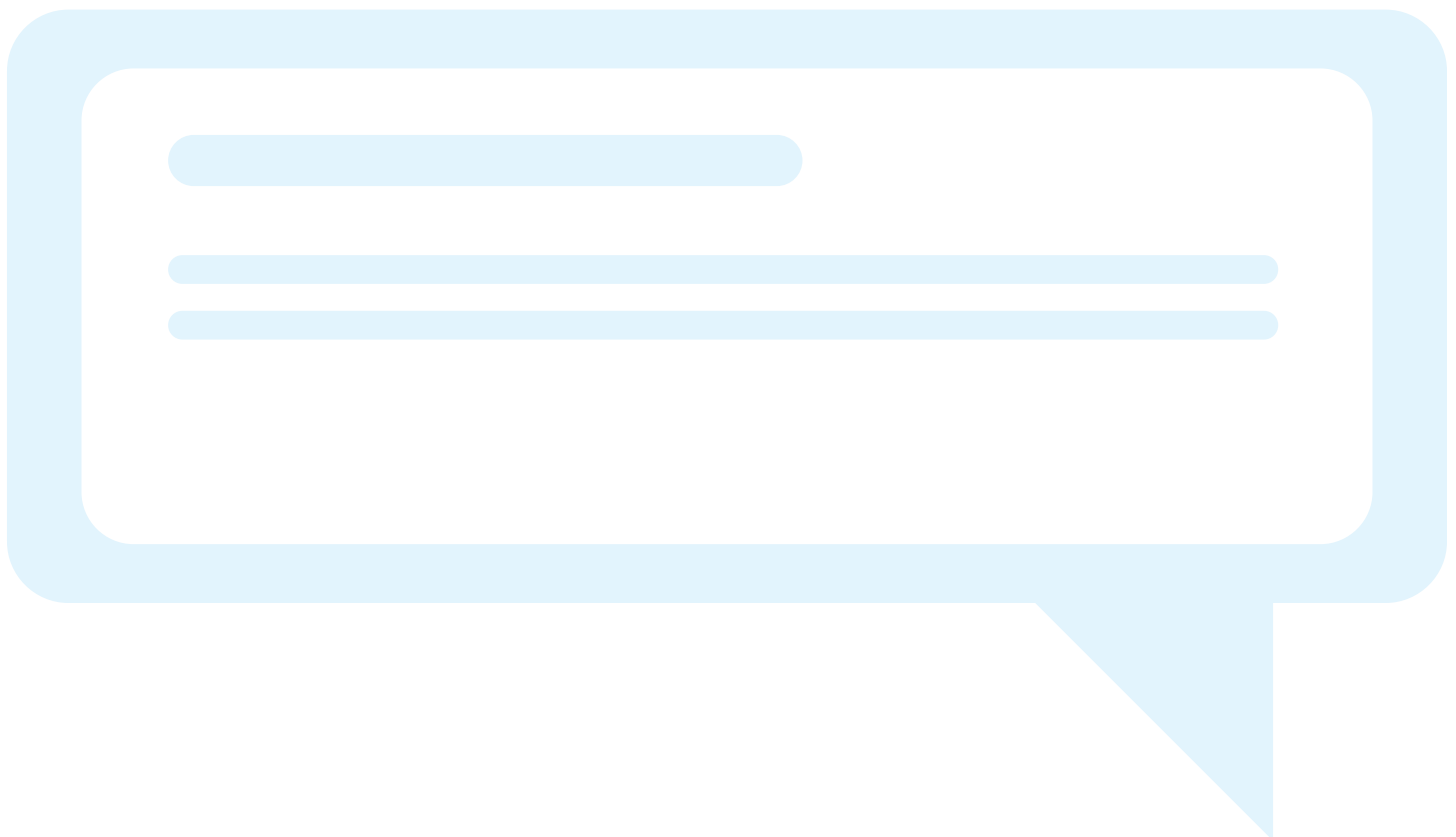
## Step 1. Business Description

Open the Business Description section. Good news! By completing Section Two in this guide, you have started a few of these items. The purpose of this section is to describe your products and services, company owners, and management team. Many of the answers you give here are part of your Executive Processes. As the owner of the company, you are responsible for the goals you set and the decisions you make.

**TIP:** *If you have a business, you already have a business structure. If you have not yet started and are not sure which business structure to choose, watch the Small Business Basics: Business Structures video included in this section. You do not need to complete your business registration right now. Continue with all the other sections of the plan. Completing more areas and conducting market research will help you decide later which business structure to choose. For now, enter the business structure you think might be best for your business. You can come back to this point later when you know if there are any other special licenses or requirements for your type of business.*



When you watch these videos, you can read the captions in your language. Click on the  icon at the bottom of the video. Then click on the  icon. Select 'Subtitles'. Finally, choose 'Auto-translate' and select a language.



## Step 2. Market Research

In murder mystery novels, great detectives ask deep questions. They pay close attention to the suspects' answers and look for clues to solve the mystery. Business owners are detectives too. Who is your target market? Who are your competitors? Are there hidden competitors? What type of industry are you in? How big or small is the industry? Is the industry growing? What do others charge for similar products or services?

It is important to know this information and update it frequently. This information will limit your risk, and technology advancements will not surprise you. Your customers' tastes will change, and new competition will arrive. When you know more, you will be better prepared. Understanding your industry will make doing business less of a mystery. The information you collect will help you create better marketing processes for your company.

Visit the Business Link website and sign up for any of our FREE market research webinars. You do not need to complete this section or any other section of your business plan by yourself.

The [Business Strategists](#)<sup>6</sup> at Business Link are always happy to provide you with free and low-cost market research.



There are many ways to conduct basic market research for your plan without spending too much time or money. Read Sections Three and Four of "[Connections: An Immigrant's Guide to Marketing your Small Business in Alberta](#)" to better understand the specific challenges immigrant entrepreneurs should be aware of for market research purposes. These sections include some simple tips for conducting market research.

## Step 3. Marketing and Sales Strategies

Your marketing processes will help you sell your product or service. Watch the video in this section and think about who your ideal customer is. Large companies spend millions of dollars marketing their products and services to customers. Your marketing budget will be much smaller. You cannot afford to spend a lot of money on marketing to everyone. The purpose of creating a marketing plan is to save time and money. A marketing plan will help you make good choices about where and how you will advertise. You need to have well-planned and focused marketing efforts, so potential customers notice your business.



For additional help with this section, download the "[Connections: An Immigrants Guide to Marketing your Small Business in Alberta](#)".

## Step 4. Management and Team

Many lenders look at this section to see what kind of skills and experience you have. They want to know who and what they are investing in. Looking for financing is not the only reason to describe your team. Even if your company is a new start-up, and you are the only person in your company, your company can only grow if you have help. Completing this section helps you:

- a) Identify the advisors you may want for help.
- b) Identify areas where your skills may not fit the tasks. For example, you may be an excellent carpenter, but can you do bookkeeping properly?

Thinking big in this section will help you in the financial section. How much will you need to charge for your products and services? How much will you need to sell to be able to afford good help for your company?

## Step 5. Operations Processes

Operational processes are designed to answer the question: How will I create and distribute my products or services?

You may need equipment to manufacture your product. If you provide services, you may rely on software and technology services to provide your services. Human Resources are also part of your operations. What people do you need to hire? What are their roles? Will the people you hire be contractors or employees? Will you have a retail storefront or a virtual store?

Successful businesses pay close attention to operational processes. Your business will save money and time by using efficient ways to sell your product or service. If you are an existing business and updating your business plan, pay special attention to this section. You can add value to your business by improving the operational processes in your business. Your company can improve cashflow and manage costs by reviewing operations frequently.

## Step 6. Financials



Many sections of the plan have boxes to enter the costs you **estimate** for start-up. These dollar values will appear in the Financials section. If you are starting a new business, review all the completed sections. Write down an estimate of what your costs might be to:

- pay for any supplies \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- pay for necessary equipment \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- train staff \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- obtain licenses, insurance and permits \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- perform construction /leasehold improvements \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- purchase inventory \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- pay staff salaries for 3-6 months \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Visit the Appendices section to fill in any other start-up cost items for your business.

As a start-up business, many of the costs will be your best guess. It is OK to guess what your costs will be. Estimate the costs to the best of your knowledge. Many new businesses underestimate the costs to open. They also overestimate the sales they will make in the first six months. If you want to be careful, it is recommended to double your estimated costs for start-up.

If you are writing a business plan and already have an operational business, you do not need to complete the start-up costs section. Instead, you may want to talk to your accountant or bookkeeper and ask for a current balance sheet, income statement and cashflow. These three documents can help you make future financial plans.

Many business owners feel frustrated when they are first learning the financial processes for their business. Getting help with this area of your business is a good business decision. Your business should make enough money to hire a bookkeeper and accountant as soon as possible. A bookkeeper and accountant should explain financial terms to you. They should also help you track all the money that flows into and out of your business. This is called cashflow. When you are creating your business plan, you will focus on cashflow. The goal of your business is to create **positive cashflow**.

**Tip:** Download and complete the cashflow template included with the IBPB. Complete this and include it as part of your business plan.



To learn more about financial fundamentals, download the Business Link Guidebook called [“Connections: An Immigrants Guide to Financial Fundamentals in Alberta”](#).



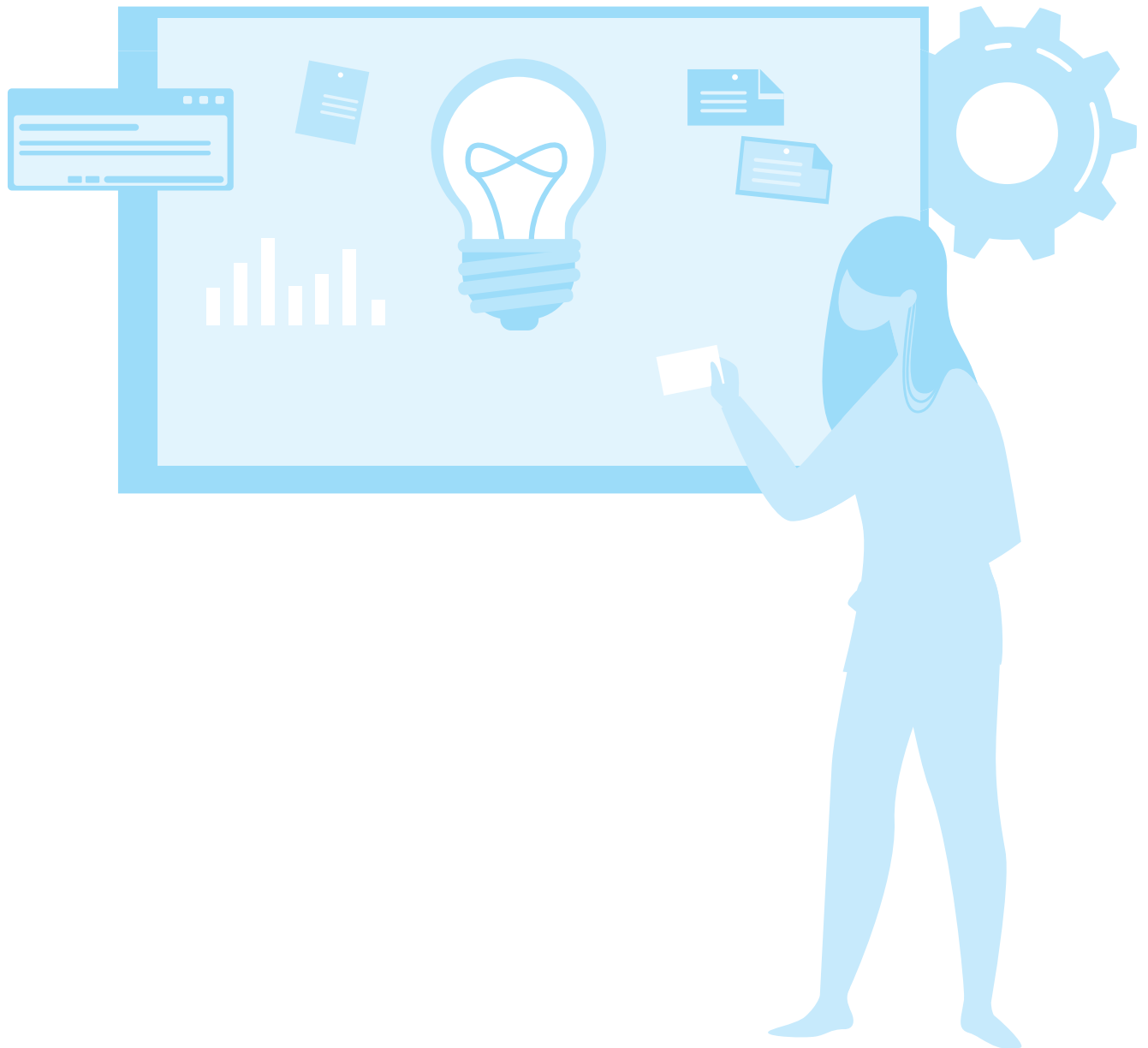
### POSITIVE CASHFLOW

means that you are making more money than you are spending. This lets you have extra cash on hand for future bills. If you are presenting your business plan to lenders, they will want to see that your business has positive cashflow.



## Step 7. Executive Summary

Open the section called “Executive Summary” and review the description. The Executive Summary is the first one to two pages of your business plan. The purpose of this section is to get readers excited about your business. Think about the first few paragraphs of a book. They are written to get you excited about the story. The Executive Summary is just like the beginning of a good book. The Executive Summary is written to get readers to turn the pages of your plan and keep reading more. Note that this section comes first in your final business plan but you will finish it last because it’s like a summary of all of the other sections.





# SECTION 6

## Using your Plan

Congratulations! If you are reading this, you have completed the IBPB.



Business Link provides business plan reviews. For a small fee, a Business Strategist will review your plan and help you improve any sections before you present your plan to a lender. Visit the Business link [website](#) for more information.

You will be able to login and update your plan anytime. Do not let your document sit on the shelf. It is a living document. Use it as a guide as you work on improving your business. Use your plan if you are struggling with a process in your business. Open the section of the plan that holds your ideas about the process you are struggling with. Try to see if there are other ways you can improve your process. Bring your plan to meetings with advisors and ask their thoughts about your processes.

Once you are done your plan you can export it to the format of your choosing, or submit it to one of our strategists for a professional review.

You can download the plan or save it as a PDF or Word document. It will save and print with all the sections in the right order.

**BUSINESSLINK**  
Interactive Business Plan Builder

Name of Business Plan

Business Description 0/5

How-To Guide

Products and Services

Purpose and Values

Ownership and Management Team

Progress and Status

Export Business Plan

Email

Microsoft Word

PDF

Google Drive

### Business Description

#### Purpose and Values

← Back Next →

**How To**    Examples

Include your mission and vision statements. A mission statement helps define a company's daily business objectives and its approach to reaching them. A vision statement states long-term objectives and the desired future state. Combined, these statements show the core purpose and values of your business.

People often get confused between mission and vision statements. Look at your mission as being your current state and your vision as the big-picture future state that you want to create.

Business Plan

Saved

My Business Plans    Log Out

**Need Help?**  
Contact one of our Small Business Strategists for help as you work through your business plan.  
[Contact Us](#)

**Resources**  
Visit our website for access to guides, videos, and other resources to help you along the way.  
[Access Resources](#)

**Finished Your Plan?**  
Get your business plan reviewed by one of our small business strategists for actionable feedback and 1:1 service.  
[Learn More](#)



# APPENDIX

- <sup>1</sup> <https://businesslink.ca/assets/uploads/2021/08/Connections-Marketing-Fillable-1.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.strategyzer.com/canvas/business-model-canvas>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://businesslink.ca/events>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.liveplan.com/blog/an-introduction-to-lean-planning>
- <sup>5</sup> <https://businesslink.ca/what-we-do/resources/interactive-business-plan-builder>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://businesslink.ca/contact>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://businesslink.ca/assets/uploads/2021/08/Connections-Financial-Fundamentals.pdf>





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