

Lowering the Barriers to Home Businesses

By Westley Sturhan

It's where some of the country's best-known companies got their start, but in too many places, regulations make running a business from home difficult or impossible. Some states and localities have begun to lower the barriers.

In Somerville, New Jersey, a woman trying to start a home baking business ran into a problem. To operate legally, she was told she would need a zoning variance, an application fee of about \$1,000, and roughly \$4,000 placed in escrow to cover the town's potential legal costs. There was no guarantee of approval. For a business that might generate a few hundred dollars a week, the costs made it impossible before it even began.

That kind of barrier would have been unfamiliar for much of American history. Many of the country's most recognizable companies began at home or in small workshops. Harley-Davidson started in a backyard shed. Mattel began in a garage. The Dell computer company was launched from a college dormitory room.

That was not unusual. For generations, starting a business did not require a lease, a loan, or a storefront. It started at home. Shopkeepers lived above their stores, bakers sold from kitchen windows, and small workshops operated out of garages and sheds.

Even today, that model persists. Around half of United States businesses are home based, and more than half of sole proprietorships operate from a residence. Many require only a few thousand dollars to launch, while opening a storefront can exceed \$100,000 once rent, build-out, and permits are included.

In much of the country, however, that path is difficult to follow. Modern zoning laws, many rooted in early twentieth century frameworks separating where people live from where they work, make it difficult or impossible to run even modest businesses from home. Rules often require businesses to be "incidental" to residential use, prohibit customer visits, limit the number of employees, and restrict visible activity.

In many communities, operating a home-based business legally requires formal approval. A study



of small business regulations across twenty United States cities found that many require special zoning permits for home-based businesses and impose restrictions on client visits, employee numbers or even how much of a home could be used for

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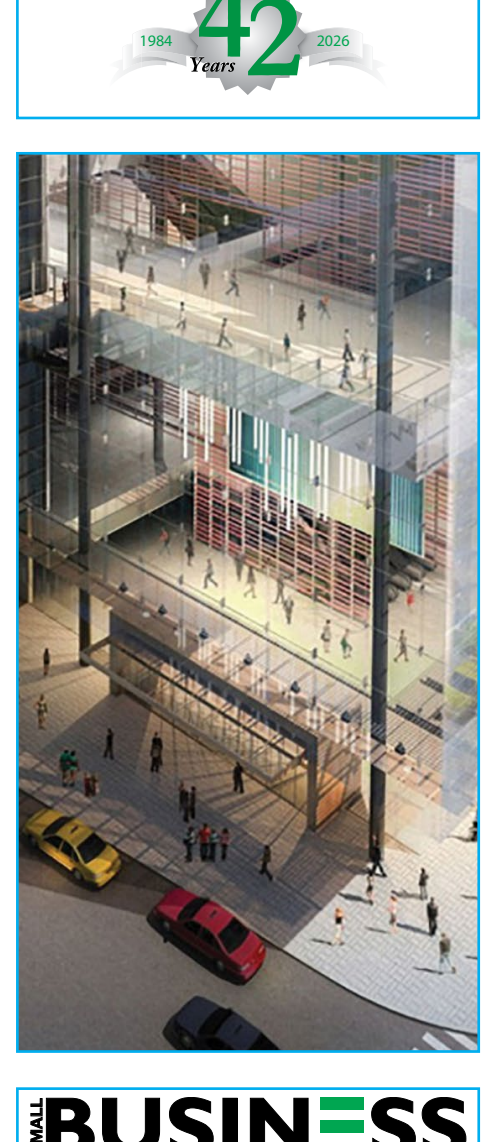
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PROJECT OVERVIEW
A new out-of-the-ground two story, approximately 80,000 square foot (SF), Operational Facility, along with an adjacent, approximately 10,000 square foot (SF), equipment yard, on a 7-acre clear greenfield site in Melville, New York. This is a purpose-built, storm-hardened, redundant, state-of-the-art operational facility.

The building will include a 2-story high Technology arena, second story observation space, offices, meetings and training rooms, break rooms with pantries, a wellness room, restrooms with showers and lockers, and an open work area for workstations or touchdowns. The facility will also contain various meeting spaces that are flexible, and capable of being subdivided into three or more rooms that may be utilized as bunk areas to house storm riders. All necessary and required mechanical, electrical, emergency back-up equipment, and systems with also be constructed.

The project construction duration is from Q1 2026 through Q4 2027.




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VIRTUAL EVENTS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

2026

Federal Contracting: Woman-Owned Small Business (WOSB) Certification Webinar
Tuesday, April 21, 2026, 2:00 pm–4:00 pm
Online
Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration
Contact: Patrice Dozier, patrice.dozier@sba.gov
Fee: Free; registration required

SBA is creating a space for Woman-Owned Small Businesses, via WOSB certification! Are you a woman owner of a small business? The federal government's goal is to award at least five percent of all federal contracting dollars to woman-owned small businesses each year. Join us for training on how to register for SBA's Woman-Owned Small Business (WOSB) program, which helps eligible small businesses to qualify for federal contracting opportunities. The monthly sessions include an overview of the self-certification process, and a discussion of the NAICS codes that qualify as WOSB or EDWOSB. Register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/woman-owned-small-businesses-tickets-1978328240021>

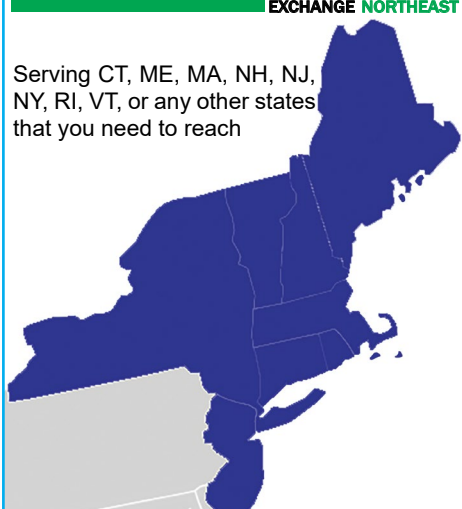
SBA 101: Introduction to SBA Programs Webinar
Tuesday, April 28, 2026, 9:00 am–10:00 am
Online
Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration, Rhode Island District Office
Contact: Brian Hopkins, 401-528-4575, brian.hopkins@sba.gov
Fee: Free; registration required

Federal Contracting for Small Businesses Webinar
Tuesday, May 12, 2026, 12:00 pm–1:30 pm
Online
Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration
Contact: Irene Gonzalez, 208-334-1673, irene.gonzalez@sba.gov
Fee: Free; registration required

Learn the essentials of federal contracting for small businesses. This event will cover the basics of navigating the federal contracting process, as well as the various certifications available to help your small business succeed in the government marketplace. Certifications include: 8(a) Business Development Program, HUBZone Certification, Woman Owned Small Business (WOSB/EDWOSB), and Veteran Owned Small Business (VOSB). Don't miss this opportunity to gain valuable insights and resources to help your small business. Register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/federal-contracting-basics-and-certifications-for-small-businesses-tickets-1977729720834>

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