

# SMALL BUSINESS FIRST

## PARTNER AGENCIES & OFFICES

	DCA
	DEP
	DOB
	DOHMH
	DOITT
	DOT
	DSNY
	FDNY
	OATH
	SBS
	TLC

- | Mayor's Office of Data Analytics
- | Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs
- | Mayor's Office of Operations
- | Mayor's Office of Technology and Innovation

New York City is a city of small businesses. Of the approximately 200,000 businesses located in the City, 98 percent are small (fewer than 100 employees) and 89 percent are very small (fewer than 20 employees). These businesses already employ nearly half of the City's workforce and they are growing. Small business owners take tremendous financial risk to transform their dreams into reality and in doing so they provide the foundation for our city's unique and diverse neighborhoods. For many New Yorkers, small business ownership also offers a first chance for economic self-determination and a path to the middle class.

As we strive to reduce inequality in our city, supporting those who pursue business ownership is vitally important. Small Business First (SB1) is Mayor Bill de Blasio's initiative to make government more effective and efficient in helping businesses start, operate, and expand. The initiative, launched in February 2015, is an inter-agency effort led by the Mayor's Office of Operations and the Department of Small Business Services (SBS). As part of SB1, 30 commitments have been made to improve the City's regulatory environment for small businesses and save business owners time, money, and hassle, as well as increase satisfaction with City services. These commitments are detailed in the [Small Business First Report](#).

Under the SB1 initiative, the City has already made strides towards helping government become more effective and efficient. In February 2016, the City launched the first Small Business Support Center to provide resources from multiple City agencies to potential entrepreneurs and business owners. The Center houses licensing, permitting, and related services from the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) with support services for businesses provided by SBS. Since opening, staff at the Center have completed 2,088 business transactions, including licenses, permits, and business support services.

In Fiscal 2016, SBS conducted door-to-door educational outreach across the city and reached over 400 businesses. The City has also reduced the number of violations that business owners must contest in person – now more than 640 violations can be adjudicated over the phone, online, or by mail. In addition, the City has made business regulations easier to understand. In Fiscal 2016, the City created 18 new guides written in plain language, targeting complex business-related topics. The 28 total guides have received more than 67,400 online visits to date.

As part of SB1, the City is on track to do a lot more. Because more businesses are looking to interact with the City via the web, the City is developing a comprehensive online portal that will centralize City services and resources for business owners, allowing entrepreneurs to see personalized information about their businesses as well as initiate transactions online.

The SB1 initiative is detailed below, and unless otherwise noted, the accomplishments listed occurred in Fiscal 2016.

## PROVIDE CLEAR INFORMATION WITH COORDINATED SERVICES AND SUPPORT

Communicating clearly and providing ample information in a central location is necessary to help the City better meet the needs of small businesses. Because small businesses are diverse, SB1 ensures that materials and services are made available and are distributed to

businesses in a variety of ways. SB1 uses different media, including online and in print, and multiple locations, including City sites and community organizations. Providing better information in a variety of ways is critical to ensuring that all small businesses understand how to comply with City rules and processes, know where to go if they need help, and are aware of all of the City resources that are available.

Accomplishments include:

- Engaged students from the educational institution General Assembly to help improve the City's online business requirements questionnaire by gathering new user experience design proposals. This project will help inform the user experience for the new portal to be launched at the end of Fiscal 17 (commitment 3).
- Opened the City's first Small Business Support Center—a central location that offers business owners in-person support, including access to licensing, permitting, and related services from DCA, DOHMH, and SBS (commitment 4).
- By hiring five additional staff members, doubled the number of staff assigned to provide one-on-one assistance to business owners and to help them navigate government processes, including two staff members now assigned to the Department of Buildings (DOB) and the Fire Department (FDNY) (commitment 5).
- Created 18 additional plain language guides to help businesses understand various agencies' business-related requirements, bringing the total number of guides to 28 (commitment 7).
- Finalized the Small Business Toolkit for restaurants, including a "Starter Guide", "Leasing Guide", "Signage Guide", and a guide to the industry's most common violations (commitment 8).
- Created guides that detail how businesses can legally use the sidewalks outside of their storefronts and where business owners can find in-person or over-the-phone services from City agencies (commitment 8).

Upcoming milestones in Fiscal 2017 include:

- Allowing users of the Portal to access multiple agency systems through a single login (commitment 1).
- Completing the installation of a section for businesses on the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Department of Transportation's (DOT) websites (commitment 2).
- Ensuring that the Small Business Support Center is operating at full capacity (commitment 4).
- Releasing additional plain language guides (commitment 7).
- Ensuring that all content in the "Start a Business" guide is up to date (commitment 8).

## HELP BUSINESSES UNDERSTAND AND COMPLY WITH CITY REGULATIONS

Creating a supportive environment for small businesses is the key to ensuring business growth in New York City. A supportive environment ensures that small business owners are not being unnecessarily burdened with violations, and helps small businesses focus on their core mission – to earn profits and expand operations. To improve the way the City interacts with small businesses, SB1 promotes compliance through education rather than primarily through punitive measures, and ensures that City agencies and employees provide the best possible customer service. In addition, SB1 works to institute more flexibility and clarity in the adjudication process to alleviate some of the burden currently felt by small businesses.

Accomplishments include:

- Launched a program through which a new team of SBS staff conduct on-site consultations to help business owners understand common business violations (commitment 9).

- Held four proactive outreach events through which representatives from SBS provided information on City regulations to over 400 business owners (commitment 10).
- Held 10 sessions of the newly developed course to train public-facing City staff in customer service and worked with City agencies to update their staff evaluations to include customer service standards (commitment 11).
- Worked with the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings on the consolidation of all of the City's administrative tribunals into one central tribunal, where every judge is able to hear cases on every violation (commitment 12).
- Simplified the adjudication process for three new violations from DOT and FDNY so business owners can now contest them over the phone, online or by mail (commitment 13).

Upcoming milestones in Fiscal 2017 include:

- Expanding awareness of the opportunity for on-site consultations and increasing the volume of consultations (commitment 9).
- Increasing the violation codes that can be heard via phone, online, or by mail to include codes from DCA and the Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) (commitment 13).

## REDUCE THE BURDEN IMPOSED BY COMPLEX REGULATIONS AND FINES

Small businesses consistently ask the City to make the rules easier to understand and follow. They express frustration with the fact that the processes to comply are time-consuming and can overlap or be duplicative. To address these issues, SB1 not only provides businesses with more information and support, but also builds on previous efforts by the City to make changes to the regulations and processes that create New York City's complex regulatory environment. In partnership with business owners, the City Council and City agencies, SB1 updates and simplifies laws and rules to better meet small business needs. In addition, the program promotes coordination among agencies and streamlining of agency processes to ensure faster and more efficient services.

Accomplishments include:

- Leveraged industry stakeholders, starting with the food and beverage industry, to advise on small business regulatory issues and provide feedback on proposed solutions (commitment 14).
- Submitted legislation to the City Law Department to consolidate and eliminate unnecessary licenses at DCA (commitment 15).
- Completed a study of four key process areas between DOB and FDNY to identify overlap and understand how they can be simplified (commitment 18).
- Proposed legislation to remove the requirement for fire suppression plan review at DOB and allow licensed fire suppression contractors to submit plans for commercial kitchen fire suppression systems (commitments 19/20).
- Created the option to submit determination requests online as part of the effort to leverage technology to streamline DOB's process for determinations (commitment 21).
- Clarified requirements to obtain a Letter of No Objection for food and beverage establishments from DOB as part of an effort to eliminate the need to obtain one (commitment 22).
- Standardized language used by plan examiners for the most frequently used plan objections at DOB to streamline the objections process (commitment 23).

Upcoming milestones in Fiscal 2017 include:

- Proposing solutions for the first regulatory review topic (commitment 14).
- Continuing to work with DOB and FDNY to implement improvements to key process areas (commitment 18).

- Streamlining the process for fire suppression plan review by removing DOB’s review and allowing licensed fire suppression contractors to submit plans for commercial kitchen fire suppression systems (commitments 19 and 20).
- Supporting DOT’s work to create a sidewalk shed notification system (commitment 24).

## ENSURE EQUAL ACCESS FOR ALL BUSINESS OWNERS

SB1 seeks to provide information and services to all small business owners in all five boroughs, by overcoming hurdles such as distance from City resources, and language and cultural barriers. To achieve this goal SB1 provides information in multiple languages, simplifies documents by removing jargon and overly technical terms, and ensures resources are available to businesses in all neighborhoods throughout the City.

Accomplishments include:

- Finalized the “Navigating Government” course and presented the course to more than 10 community groups (commitment 26).
- Held five multi-agency educational events, one in each borough, to provide opportunities for business owners to interact directly with agency staff (commitment 27).
- Instituted a referral system at TLC to provide financial counseling services to drivers (commitment 28).
- Finalized the curriculum for the “Writing in Plain Language” course and held five sessions with more than 60 participants (commitment 29).
- Ensured that inspectors at seven City regulatory agencies have mobile devices to access language interpretation services in the field (commitment 30).
- Translated 12 plain language guides into at least one of the six most commonly used languages in New York City (commitment 30).

Upcoming milestones in Fiscal 2017 include ensuring that the remaining 11 plain language guides are translated into the six most commonly used languages in New York City (commitment 30).

## PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

As implementation of Small Business First continues, agency partners will keep working to design and track performance indicators related to the various commitments impacting business owners.

Indicator	FY16	Notes
<b>Increase Customer Satisfaction</b>		
Overall level of business owner satisfaction across City agencies	--	Customer satisfaction will be measured using the Business Customer Service Survey which the Mayor’s Office of Operations developed. The survey will be implemented by early Fiscal 2017 and will collect information through City-business interaction points such as inspector visits, service centers, Compliance Advisor site visits, and the NYC Small Business Support Center. The Fiscal 2017 PMMR will report the percentage of business owners that rated their overall customer experience as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’. Additionally, the number of surveys received from business owners will be reported.
Number of agency staff trained in customer service	245	Once data is available, this metric will be revised to reflect the percentage of total non-inspectorial public-facing staff trained in customer service.
<b>Provide Clear Information with Coordinated Services and Support</b>		
Number of visits to the online business portal	--	The online business portal is currently under development. Reporting on this measure will begin once the portal is launched.
Number of transactions initiated through the online business portal	--	The online business portal is currently under development. Reporting on this measure will begin once the portal is launched.

Indicator	FY16	Notes
<b>Increase Customer Satisfaction</b>		
Number of services provided at the One-Stop Business Center	2,088	The Small Business Support Center started receiving customers in February 2016; data reported here covers a five-month period.
<b>Help Businesses Understand and Comply with City Regulations</b>		
Number of businesses assisted by Small Business Compliance Advisors and Client Managers	1,013	All new Compliance Advisors and Client Managers were hired by March 2016. Deployment of new Compliance Advisors began in May 2016.
Number of violation codes opened up to alternative adjudication methods since the start of SB1	646	Once data is available, this metric will be revised to reflect the percentage of total eligible violation codes that can be adjudicated by alternative methods.
<b>Reduce the Burden Imposed by Complex Regulations and Fines</b>		
Time to open a business, by business type	--	In Fiscal 2016, SBS and the Mayor's Office of Data Analytics (MODA) completed preliminary analysis of time to open for restaurants. SBS will continue to work with MODA to determine the viability of adequate measurements for restaurant time to open and the feasibility of any additional sectors for analysis.
Time to complete specific interagency processes	--	The DOB-FDNY Coordination study is complete. Specific interagency processes are now undergoing analysis to determine plans for implementing improvements.
<b>Ensure Equal Access for All Business Owners</b>		
Number of community groups trained to assist local businesses	--	Training curriculum completed and reviewed by a cohort of community groups. Trainings will begin in Fiscal 2017.
Number of educational events for business owners	264	

## NOTEWORTHY CHANGES, ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS

- The indicator "Number of transactions initiated through the online business portal" has been revised from "Number of visits to the online business portal" to better indicate the utility of the portal.
- The indicator "Number of services provided at the One-Stop Business Center" has been revised from "Number of customer visits to the One-Stop Business Center" to more accurately reflect the data that is available from the Small Business Support Center.
- The indicator "Number of violation codes opened up to alternative adjudication methods" now measures a cumulative number of violation codes opened throughout the Small Business First initiative, instead of only the number of codes opened in the last fiscal year.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For additional information on items referenced in the narrative, go to:

- Small Business First Report:  
<http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/smallbizfirst/downloads/pdf/small-business-first-report.pdf>

