



# Local Business Tool Kit

Resources and Tools for Business Owners in our Region



# Table of Contents

**1**

**Business Idea**

**4**

**Brand Identity**

**5**

**Starting a Business**

**8**

**Running a Business**

**9**

**Insurance and Liability**

**10**

**Marketing**

**12**

**The Workforce**

**13**

**Grants and Funding**

# Business Idea



## You and Your Idea

*It all starts with an idea...*

- Is your idea original?
- Can your idea be produced and distributed?
- Is there a market for your product or service?
- Do you have access to enough financing?
- Will your idea make money?

*Are you ready to be an entrepreneur?*

- Do you have willpower and self-discipline?
- Can you adapt quickly to changing conditions?
- Do you have the stamina to work 12–16 hour days for months or even years?
- Are you prepared to lower your standard of living while your business grows?
- Are you prepared to spend your savings on your business?
- Are you willing to invest your salary and business profits back into your business to help it grow?



## Find Start-Up Costs

*Facility Expenses*

- Rent/Lease/Property Ownership
- Renovations

*Equipment and Supplies*

- Shelving/Storage
- Office Equipment
- Computer System
- Security System
- Vehicles/Trailers
- Employee Materials

*Financial Services*

- Insurance
- Accountant or Bookkeeper (Chamber members receive a FREE 2-hour financial health check with either [EBT Chartered Accountants](#) or [JMH & Co](#))
- Legal Services

*Business Documentation*

- Business License
- Business Permits (Bonded, Development, Industry-Specific, etc.)

*Other Expenses*

- Staffing/Training
- Product Inventory
- Utility Set-Up (Internet, phone)
- Marketing Services



## Research

*Assess the market by looking into:*

- Competitors
- Product suppliers
- Lawyers
- Accountants/bookkeepers
- Bankers
- Strategic locations
- Costs for renovations/equipment/permits
- Business name availability ([nuans.com](http://nuans.com))

Once a potential location is selected, check local by-law, zoning, permits (bonded or development permits for example), or licensing requirements (this may include fire, health, pollution, property use, etc.). A lawyer should review your lease.

## Ownership Types

*Choose a structure that suits your needs:*

- Sole proprietorships: good for entrepreneurs with limited assets or who want full control
- Corporations: useful if scale is a major priority
- Partnerships: challenging, but useful in reducing risks from creating a company

\*A lawyer can assist you with these agreements. Chamber members receive [1 FREE hour business law consultation with Pritchard & Co.](#)

## Hiring

*When considering hiring, ask yourself:*

- Do you need staff? If so, how many?
- What will their wage be?
- Is their wage similar to the industry standard?
- Will they receive benefits, pension or RRSP sharing?
- What are their vacation benefits?
- Will they need any training?
- Will you be offering group insurance? ([The Chamber's Group Insurance Plan is the #1 plan in Canada for all small to medium sized businesses](#))
- How will you do their payroll? When will you submit payroll tax to the Government? Members [receive 30% off of Payworks](#)
- Will you need WBC coverage? (Workers Compensation)

\*Members can access [RedRock HR's FREE HR Toolkit.](#)



## ✓ Create a Business Plan

*A business plan has certain elements:*

- Products or services offered
- A description of the company's industry, including your competition
- A marketing plan that outlines how your target market will be reached
- A production plan that outlines your products or services will be produced or obtained
- How the company will be organized
- A budget: describing sources of money to finance the business and projected financial statements

\*Take a look at Business Link's "[How to create a business plan](#)".

## ✓ Apply for Licensing

*Licensing you need includes:*

- City or Town business license (In [Medicine Hat](#) and [Brooks](#) you can apply online)
- Business & GST number (applicable if you have more than \$30,000 in sales in a 12 month consecutive period and/or if you intend to hire employees)
- Registration from [Alberta Registries](#)

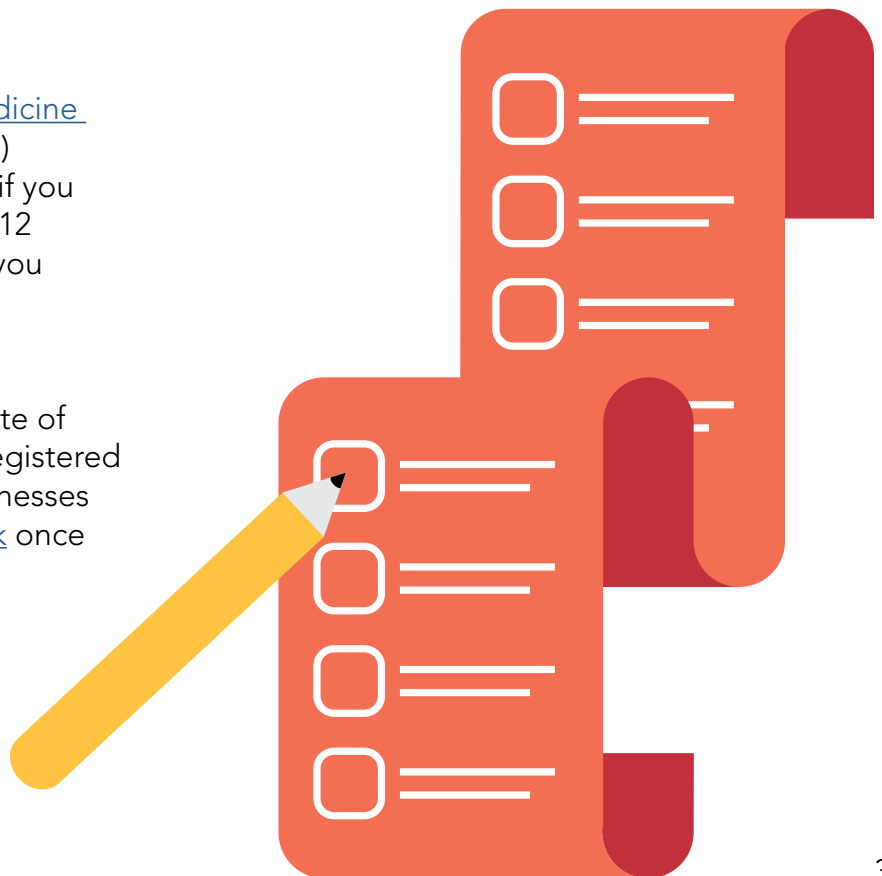
If you are a Limited Company, a certificate of incorporation must be purchased and registered with Alberta Registries . All Alberta businesses must have a copy of the [OHS Handbook](#) once registered as well.

## ✓ Additional Items

*What you should know:*

- Your customer profile
- Your [proposed business name](#)
- A practical time frame for opening
- The current state of the market, including the price of real estate, cost of supplies, and demand of products or services
- A 12-month cash flow projection of your business
- An exit strategy to capitalize on profits or to minimize losses, some options include selling the business, hiring a manager, and liquidation

Visit [canada.ca/business](#) for federal resources on a variety of relevant topics. Organizations like [BDC](#) and [Community Futures](#) assist business. For additional resources or specific questions, reach out to the Chamber of Commerce.



# Brand Identity

## Find your Foundation

A vision statement captures what your long term goals and aspirations are. A mission statement is about your purpose and what your business does. When creating these it's also good to write down your business values. Think about factors like:

- Why are you doing what you're doing?
- How do you want your business to be perceived?

## Brand Expression

Once you know the what, who and why of your business, ask yourself these questions:

- What characteristics describe your brand?
- What do you want the tone of your communications to be?
- What will your visual identity be?
- What will your logo be?

When creating a logo, keep it simple, memorable and true to you. Ensure it's legible in different spaces, and on different colours like black and white (make different variations if you need). Need assistance with your brand's visual identity? [Visit our business directory](#). Strengthen your brand identity by doing Flag Five's and Evoke Inspired Marketing's [Branding Your Business Challenge](#). Consider these different components of visual identity:

- Colour pallet
- Font choices
- Imagery and graphics

Let's look at the Chamber's brand identity as an example:



The flame in the Chamber logo represents us "fuelling" the business community, which is what our organization is all about. There are a few different variations of our logo that we use for different purposes, to ensure it's legible on all types of backgrounds.



These are our brand colours that we use in all of our communications to maintain a consistent image.

## Adobe Caslon Pro (Titles)

### *Adobe Caslon Pro Italic (Subtitles)*

#### Avenir Light (Body Text)

These are our main fonts that we use in communications. By consistently using the same logo, colours, graphics, and fonts across every touch point in your business, you create a consistent experience for every interaction with your brand.

# Starting a Business

## ✓ Banking and Finance

*Set up these items before you open:*

- Financing, loans, and business accounts
- An accounting system including your bookkeeper and/or accountant
- A financial plan to manage cash flow and account for months with lower revenue
- A way to take payments from customers

Renting presents opportunities for cost savings, flexibility, and protection against many infrastructure expenses. Chamber members are offered preferred rates on [ClearTEQ POS software and technical support with Auto-Star](#). Chamber members are offered a [Free 2-Hour Portfolio Evaluation & Financial Plan from Kunz Financial Group](#).

## ✓ Marketing

*Consider these items to advertise:*

- Website
- Signage
- Social media pages: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn etc.
- Business Cards
- Digital or physical advertisements
- Health and Wellness businesses may benefit from clinic managers. Popular options include Noterro, Varago, and Fresha
- Chamber Members receive exclusive advertising deals with [Pattison Outdoor Advertising](#), [Rock 105.3](#), [Jack 102.1](#), [Wild 94.5](#), and [My 96](#)

## ✓ Suppliers & Shipping

Depending on the products you need, you may be able to source them locally, across Alberta, or even our neighboring provinces. Specialty businesses will likely need equipment that is difficult to find pre-owned. Member companies can list office furniture, commercial items, and equipment through our [Buy Sell Exchange](#) page.

- Are you going to be shipping out your product? Chamber members receive discounted and simplified shipping solutions through [Freightcom](#) and [Purolator](#)
- Renovations may be needed, estimate costs in advance
- Insurance costs are major factors in expenses





## Set a Start Date

- Pick a suitable date to open your doors
- About a month after, you can host a [grand opening](#). The Chamber has tools and connections to help spread awareness, including a massive pair of scissors for the ceremonial ribbon cutting!
- For assistance in planning your grand opening, contact the Chamber of Commerce for guidance and supplies



## Staff

*If you need staff to run your business, consider:*

- Posting your job listings on Indeed
- Chamber members can post jobs for free using the [job board](#) on the Chamber's website, these postings boost Indeed job listings
- Consider hiring a student through [Work Integrated Learning](#)
- Consult with the Chamber for job matching services
- Connect with [Community Futures](#) for HR services and support



## Chamber Membership

*Why be part of the Southeast Alberta Chamber of Commerce?*

- Save money
- Build your network
- Save time and stay informed
- Find solutions to your business problems
- Benefit from advertising
- Raise your reputation

The Chamber is here to help all businesses, investing in it is an investment in our community. The Chamber supports small, medium, franchise, and home-based businesses. Memberships start at only \$18.33/month, and you have access to all the member benefits! Fill out the online application form [here](#).



## Start Up Checklist:

- Market Analysis*  
What market are you in, and what other organizations already exist there? How did other businesses achieve success?
- Competitive Standing*  
What makes your business special? Define what you are able to offer that other competitors in the same sphere are not offering.
- Projections*  
How much will providing your service cost you? What profit margin do you want to stay competitive? What is your break even point? What suppliers will you use?
- Customer Base*  
Who do you expect will buy your product? How will you reach them? Is it valuable to sell in person at trade shows, or online?
- Staying Agile*  
What is your plan if you don't get your desired returns? Can you change manufacturers? How much debt are you willing to have?
- Promotion*  
How will you let people know what you're doing, and how they can benefit? A good place to start is social media, registering your Google MyBusiness, and word of mouth advertising.
- Registration*  
Do you have all necessary permits and registration to comply with local business regulations? A local legal firm can help make sure you're compliant.
- Ownership*  
Being a business owner is extremely rewarding, but is also extremely difficult. Are you financially and emotionally equipped to move forward?

# Running a Business

## ✓ Monitor & Assess

*Understand what is and isn't working:*

- Cash flow: Actual vs Budget
- Marketing: How can you cut ineffective marketing and where can you strengthen good marketing?
- Competition: How do you compare to similar businesses?
- Staff: do you need more or less?
- Goals: set goals on what you can improve

Check customer satisfaction in person and through surveys, emails, and reviews. Chamber members receive [1 FREE hour with Paterson Consulting](#) to discuss business related topics of their choice.

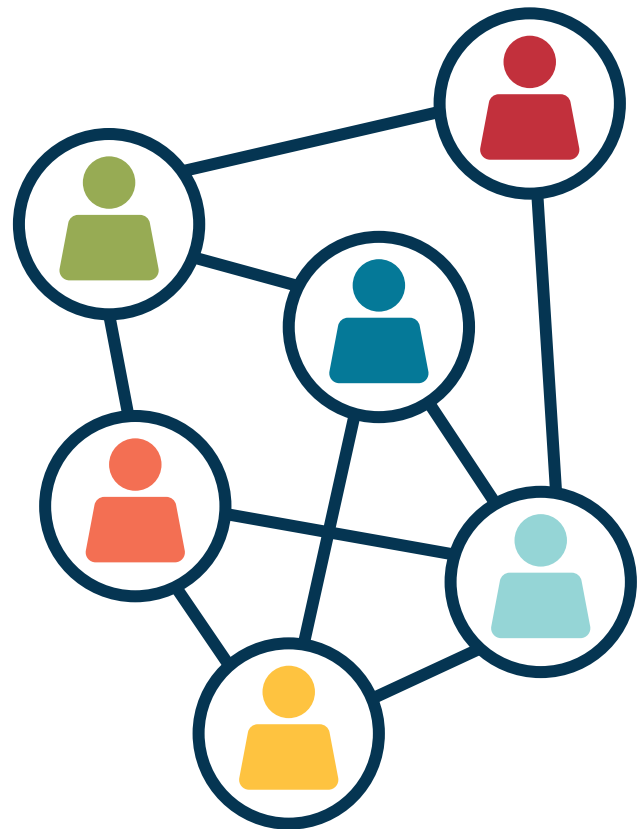
## ✓ Networking

*Be involved in your community by:*

- Introducing yourself to your neighbors
- Sponsoring community organization campaigns
- Attending networking events. [The Chamber often hosts these!](#)
- Considering getting involved in a [committee](#)
- Participating in trade shows such as [The Southeast Alberta Home & Leisure Tradeshow](#) in early spring, and the [Brooks Home + Leisure Tradeshow](#) in early fall
- Keeping up to date with advocacy, local news, economic impacts, important funding and much more by subscribing to our newsletter: [The Voice](#)

## ✓ Helpful Hints

- Listen to your clients or customers about things you are doing well, and what can improve
- Expansion is good, but don't stretch yourself too thin
- Keep in close communication with your bank, financing company, shareholders, and partners
- Continually re-evaluate your business plan, improving it as you go
- Work hard & it will pay off!
- Have fun!



# Insurance & Liability

## ✓ Liability Risks

*Other business risks can include:*

- On-site injury (Employee Work-Related Injury)
- Employment practices
- Damage due to product or service failure
- Cyber liability
- Slander and libel claims
- Extras risks pertinent to your industry

There are many different types of liability insurance. The most common types of liability protection include:

- Commercial general liability
- Professional liability (also known as errors & omissions coverage)
- Cyber liability
- Directors & officer's liability
- Product liability

Connect with a [commercial insurance broker](#) to make sure you're covered.



## ✓ Business Insurance

Business insurance needs can vary depending on many factors. Home-based businesses require adjustments to homeowners insurance. Owning a commercial property is a strong investment that allows you to customize the building to suit your needs. Business insurance protects you from sudden liability costs relating to premises, operations, products, and commercial auto.

- Contact a commercial insurance broker, like [BrokerLink](#) to build a policy that suits your specific professional needs
- As your business grows and changes, your insurance and risk management strategy should change as your needs do

## ✓ Other Liability Risks

- Pay close attention to who has access to your social media, because you may be vulnerable to lawsuits based on online behavior
- Reduce the potential of harassment lawsuits relating to ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender discrimination
- Data breaches are increasingly dangerous, especially for employers who have sensitive data relating to employees and patrons

You can be protected from these and other risks through business general liability insurance.

# Marketing



## Social Media

### *Consider your needs:*

- Is my service self-explanatory?
- How should I engage with my customers?
- Would my business benefit from a fan base?
- Should I engage with other businesses?

### *Consider what's available:*

- Instagram (can link to Facebook): great for creating "in the moment content" allowing customers and clients to feel like they're a part of your day; a very visual app
- Facebook (can link to Instagram): great for events and connecting with other businesses
- X (formerly Twitter): a platform great for polls, announcements and business updates
- Youtube: very effective for teaching customers about your business
- LinkedIn: great for highlighting your company culture, and sharing achievements, ideal if your customers are other businesses

\*Strong presence on one platform is better than a weak presence on several

### *Additional Tools:*

- Canva is a great tool to assist in creating social media posts. Use their predesigned templates, lay text over your image, use your new brand colours
- Visit [pexels.com](https://pexels.com) or [unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com) for beautiful and free stock photography



## Stay Relevant

### *Keep people thinking about you:*

- Post: achievements and products
- Launch: promotional drives, like contests or advertisements
- Be consistent: don't let people forget your business exists
- Consider: partnerships with other organizations or businesses, like co-sponsoring local events.
- Collaborate: to reach further audiences
- Post: achievements, products, services, etc

\*Members can tag the chamber in their posts, and we will repost them for free!



## Analytics

### *Understand what's working:*

By using analytics in social media you can understand how to drive growth and efficiency. Compare your online audience to your in-person audience. Make and track your performance goals. Some different types of analytics to keep track of are:

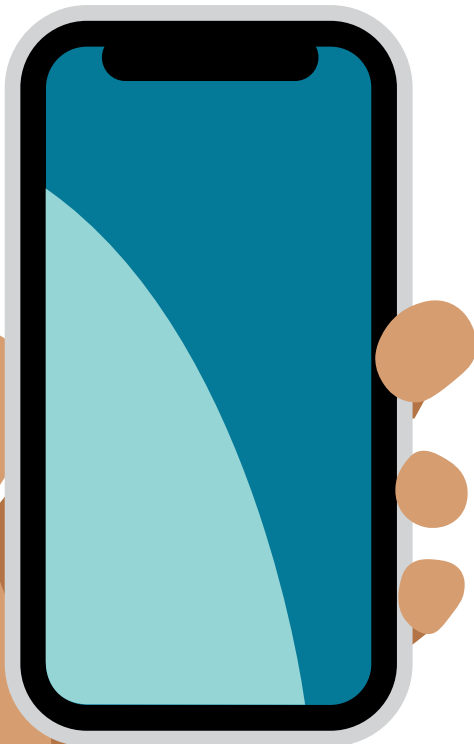
- Reach: How many people see your content
- Interactions: The amount of times your content is displayed on a screen, whether it was clicked or not
- Followers: The number of followers you have on your profile or account



## E-Commerce

- About 6.5 trillion dollars are spent through e-commerce every year; not having your business available online limits your profit potential
- Look into international shops like Instagram Shops, Shopify or Etsy
- E-Commerce allows your business to operate outside of your business hours, with minimal staffing requirements
- Keep your online storefronts regularly active just like your social media; customers don't want to find an item they really like, only to learn you no longer sell it

E-Commerce is only as complicated or simple as you make it. Making a small set of offerings available online is a great way to test for public interest and to measure how much time you can commit to a secondary storefront.



## Advertising

*Here are some FREE ways to advertise:*

- Create your Google business profile to show up on Google search and maps
- Claim your business on popular review sites like Yelp and TripAdvisor
- Attend networking events ([the Chamber hosts these](#))
- Consistently post on social media

*Other ways to advertise:*

- Make a website
- Print signage for the front of your business
- Make and print business cards
- Create and advertise a business website
- Get signage for the front of your business
- Have ads on posters, transit benches, buses, and more (Members save with [Pattison Outdoor Advertising](#))
- Run ads on the local radio (Members save with [Rock 105.3, Jack 102.1, Wild 94.5, and My 96](#))
- Run a local TV ad (Members save with [Chat TV](#))
- Members can access online marketing tools through [Constant Contact](#)
- Advertise on the Chamber's website, e-newsletter, social media and promotions. Connect with us to learn more!

# The Workforce

## Find the Right Fit

### *Give Applicants Details About the Role*

- Do you offer upward mobility and promotions for employees?
- Do your staff have benefits through a program like the [Chamber Group Insurance Plan?](#)
- Is the pay flexible, and do you reward staying with pay increases?
- Make sure any external job postings are detailed about what the day-to-day looks like

### *Choosing the Best People*

- Look beyond qualifications, you can train for a role but you can't change an applicant's behavior and personality
- Know what they're getting out of the role: Are their priorities being paid well, getting connected, gaining experience?
- Make sure your interview process is consistent and well-structured to give every applicant a fair shot

## Workplace Standards

- [Employment Standards](#) will provide the minimum standards that employers must follow in Alberta. The chamber has HR professionals that can also assist with building human resource policies.
- Employers also have to be aware of and have a copy of the [Alberta Occupational Health and Safety standards](#).
- [Community Futures Entre-Corp](#) has excellent HR Resources

## Grow & Retain Staff

### *Retain your staff by:*

- Creating opportunities for your staff to grow
- Reviewing your compensation structure
- Gathering employee feedback
- Considering the [Chamber Group Insurance Plan](#) to give benefits, HR consultants to gauge employee sentiment, or revising pay structures
- Providing competitive pay/supplementing pay with other forms of compensation like benefits and events

Staff growth opportunities are investments in the quality of your staff. Ask employees what they think of company culture, the pay, if they like their job, and learn where to improve. The cheapest (and by far the most effective) way to retain employees is to make your workplace one that people enjoy being in.

## Healthy Workplaces

- Make sure your employees know what workplace toxicity looks like, and how to avoid it
- Know your organizational culture, to know who fits best
- Recognize people that go above and beyond, people will not put in extra effort if they never receive credit for their hard work

# Grants & Funding



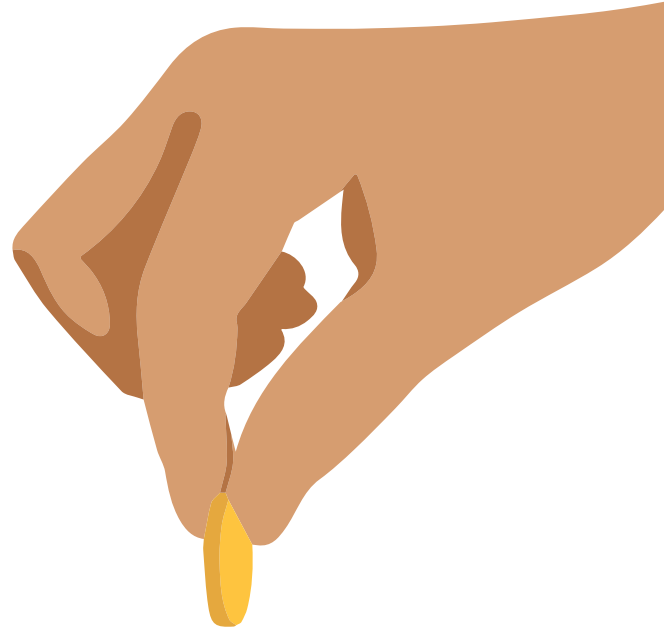
## Find Opportunities

*Consider how you qualify:*

- Is your business owned by FNMI, 2SLGBTQI+, international citizens, minorities, women, or other groups?
- What is your business size?
- Are you engaging in any unique initiatives or programs?
- What would you use the grant money for?

*Find grants that apply to you*

- Research provincial grants online, through [government-provided resources](#)
- Federal grants might also be applicable, check sites like [canada.ca](#)
- Ask the Chamber of Commerce about grant information, or visit our [online resources](#)

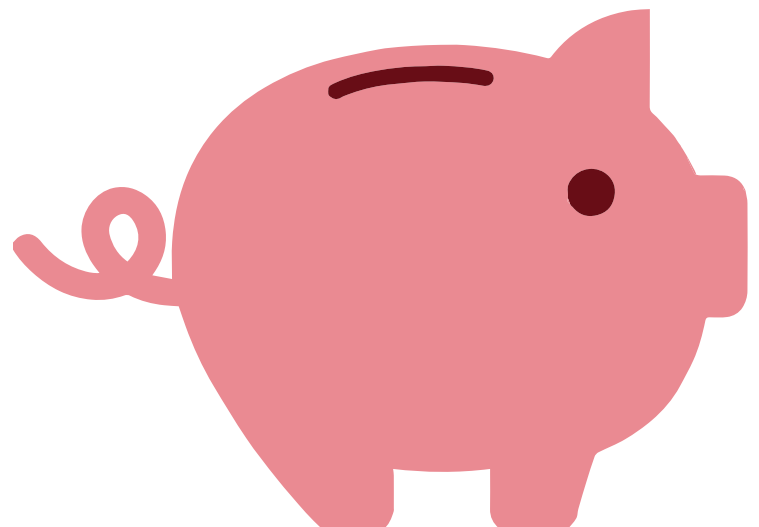


## Additional Funding

*Consider reaching out to:*

- [A financial institution](#) because they are constantly competing to offer loans
- Financial professionals because they can help with planning for repayment and streamlining the process
- [Medicine Hat Economic Development](#) and [Brooks Newell Economic Development](#) can provide both funding and support

Loans are meant to grow when business is good, not to stay afloat when business is slow.





[www.southeastalbertachamber.ca](http://www.southeastalbertachamber.ca)

413 6th Avenue SE, Medicine Hat  
(403) 527-5214