



# Grand Opening Guide

Pennsylvania Small Business Development Centers

Congratulations! Your Grand Opening represents an important time for your business. By working with your local SBDC, you are already on the path to starting a successful entrepreneurial venture. This guide will help you plan your Grand Opening event with a proven timeline, simple checklists, and press release templates to make the launch of your new business a success.



**Small Business Development Centers**

*Helping businesses start, grow, and prosper.*

# Grand Opening Checklist

*(Make sure to keep your local SBDC in the loop on all planning activities)*

Set your date and time:

Set a budget:

## Finalize program for the day

Emcee:

Guest Speaker 1:

Subject matter:

Guest Speaker 2:

Subject matter:

Guest Speaker 3:

Subject matter:

Designate a person to reach out to speakers to confirm attendance, and serve as point of contact:

## Invitations

- Design invitations
- Set a RSVP date:
- Finalize guest list
- Designate a contact person to RSVP:
- Deadline to print/mail/email:
- Date to send reminder:

## Media

- Prepare event press release  
Date to send:
- Prepare media alert  
Date to send:
- Prepare post-event press release  
Date to send:
- Compile list of local media – work with your local SBDC if you need assistance

## Materials Needed (flyers, party supplies, etc.):

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Assign staff to coordinate specific tasks

- Caterer:
- Photographer/Videographer:
- Florist:
- Name Tags:
- Set-up:
- Giveaways/Door prizes:
- Parking:
- Photographer:
- Greeters:
- VIP coordinator:
- Tour Guide:
- Music:
- Thank Departing Guests:
- Teardown:
- Clean Up:
- Other:

## Post-event tasks

- Send thank-you notes
- Add all event information and photos to website and newsletter
- Add photos and event information to Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites
- Send photos and post-event press release to media and your local SBDC
- Input all business cards collected into client database and plan for follow-up

### Turn the page for detailed step-by-step Grand Opening tips on how to:

1. Set Your Date and Time
2. Determine Event Activity Options
3. Select Featured Speakers
4. Finalize Event Schedule
5. Complete Invitee List
6. Create Formal Announcement & Invitations
7. Designate Coordinators for Tasks
8. Prepare For Media Coverage
9. Plan For Logistical Needs & Event Materials

## STEP 1: Set Your Date and Time

- Allow plenty of time for planning, one or two months lead time is a good rule of thumb.
- Watch out for major holidays and other busy times of the year such as “wedding season,” and graduations. Take note of any special holidays for officials. Be aware of major sporting events.
- Check other local events—i.e., Chambers of Commerce, other business schedules.
- Luncheon events are well attended. The best time for luncheons is between 11:30 am - 1:00 pm.
- After work events are also well attended, as they do not interfere with the work day. The best time for post-work events is between 4:30 pm - 6:30 pm.
- Avoid mid-morning and mid-afternoon times.
- Set a rain date in advance if weather could affect your event.

## STEP 2: Determine Event Activity Options

- Traditional events include a few speeches, a ribbon cutting, and some give-a-ways.
- Other activity ideas include: a tour, sign unveiling, exhibits (blue prints, machinery, etc.), recognition of VIPs, music or other entertainment (radio station), a raffle or door prize (use raffle tickets to build customer database), prize displays, refreshment stations—both drink and food.
- Open House – Casual event which lasts several hours. Guests come and go informally and visit your business.
- “Soft Opening” – A soft opening is when a business opens its doors before the official Grand Opening for the purpose of testing out your services before the big day. A soft opening is not highly advertised. This allows your business to utilize a small test set of customers in order to create a buzz and to test products, services or process without all the pressures of a large crowd that a Grand Opening would bring.
- Serving food and beverages – Although it’s an added expense that you may prefer to avoid, serving food and beverage of some kind is almost a necessity for a successful event.
  - Morning events - coffee, juices, fruit and pastries are usually sufficient. A full breakfast is not necessary.
  - At lunchtime events, serve some kind of sandwich or buffet meal. Remember, it’s your guest’s lunchtime and they will expect some kind of filling food.
  - During the late afternoon or early evening events, light hors d’oeuvres or finger foods are appropriate. Chips, dips, cheeses, vegetable, fruit or cold-cut trays are ideal.
- Think out of the box, what would make your business event different?

## STEP 3: Select Featured Speakers

- Choose a Master of Ceremonies to welcome your guests and introduce speakers. This person can also offer remarks, thanks, and recognize VIPs in attendance.
- Guest speakers: contact them within the month to give them ample time to prepare remarks, set up a time limit for each speaker. Call one week before event to confirm attendance.

#### STEP 4: Finalize Event Schedule

- You should compile a brief, written program for all participants with speaking roles. Be sure to provide recognition for sponsors and key people. Keep it short, one page is good.
- As a general rule, no planned program (speeches, etc.) should last more than 20 to 30 minutes, with 10 minutes being ideal. Plan your speakers order and time limit ahead of time. Have a set schedule. Make sure a photographer and/or videographer is scheduled.
- Sample event schedule:
  1. Welcome guests
  2. Introduction to your company, your hours of operation and anything unique to your business
  3. Introduction of Board or VIPs
  4. Call up the guest speakers
  5. Cut the ribbon, usually by company head or dignitaries, or all employees, make sure to have the guest do a count down and get the photographer(s)/media ready.
  6. Thank everyone for attending
  7. Offer attendees to join in any activities planned, tour, food, entertainment, etc.

#### STEP 5: Compile Invitee List

- A good guest list includes:
  - current and past customers;
  - potential/target customers;
  - suppliers;
  - family & friends;
  - your Board of Directors or business partners;
  - employees and spouses/significant others;
  - people that helped you start – bankers, accountants, contractors, attorneys and advisors;
  - Investors;
  - fellow business people, neighboring businesses, business associations;
  - key government officials – Mayors, legislators, and City Council members; and
  - the media.
- Potential/target customers include those to whom your business wants to sell/provide a service. This type of customer should be the decision-makers who, in a family or another business, will decide to use your company's services. Grand Openings are an opportunity to highlight what is unique about your company to this group. Sources of target names include known customers, results of internet searches, and networking efforts.
- Develop a customer database (ongoing – not just useful for Grand Openings). The database should include information such as a customer's name, address, phone number, email address, and a column for the source of the target name "web research." Use this database to make cold calls, mail postcards, email blasts, issue invitations, etc.

#### STEP 6: Create Formal Announcement & Invitations

- Create an announcement that can be mailed, emailed, left behind for neighboring/local businesses to distribute on your behalf, or to put in gift bags.
- Personalize any letters you send with the customer's name, if possible.
- Plan the type of invitation: formal letter, informal letter, postcard, email or flyer.

- Be sure to include your name, type of event, date, timeframe, and address. You may want to include your business card and directions (map) to the site of the event. Remember to include your logo and multiple ways for customers to reach you – office phone number, hours, email, and/or website addresses.
- Mail/email the announcement shortly before the grand opening (between 1 and 2 weeks). If applicable, send physical card first, then use the e-version “Save the Date” as a reminder about 1-2 weeks later.
- Depending on the type of business, you may want to include some kind of “offer” in your announcement (coupon code, special item on sale only for Grand Opening).
- Consider other methods to get the word out: signs, websites, newsletters, craigslist, Chambers of Commerce, college/university magazines, client distribution lists, Facebook, Twitter, media event and online calendar listings, etc.

### STEP 7: Designate Coordinators for Tasks

- To ensure a successful event, make sure that tasks are assigned and the person is aware of their tasks in advance.
- If you have tours, designate an exact location to gather. The tour guide should also know about the business so they can answer any questions.

### STEP 8: Prepare For Media Coverage

A well-prepared news release is the key to having your Grand Opening published in the local media. Be sure to include what is exciting and different about your company and a brief biographical sketch about the owner background and business specialties. (Refer to samples provided at the end of this document).

Compose a Press Release:

- Keep the release brief, preferably one page. Two to three paragraphs is sufficient.
- Make sure to check the local community calendar for all local media. Send your release to: television and radio stations, newspapers, online sites, Chambers of Commerce and any community-minded companies and organizations.
- The top left of your press release should include your logo, then the date. To the top right should be the phrase “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE,” followed by the business’ contact information.
- Always include the name, phone and email address of the main contact for questions from the media. Listing more than one contact is advised.
- Always provide at least one photograph with every release to newspapers, even if the photo is only a head-shot of the business owner. A good photograph may increase the chances that your release will be used.
- Be precise with dates and times of your event, for example: Wednesday, May 9, 2012 and 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
- The release must answer the 5 W’s—who, what, when, where and why. The first four should be placed in the first or lead paragraph, the why should be explained in the second paragraph.
- Do not ask for the media to hold onto a press release until a later date. Send it when you want it released.
- Make sure your company contact including the website is at the end of the release.
- Add “###” at the end, centered and double-spaced, to let the media know that is the end of the release.

### Compose a Media Alert:

- A media alert is substantially shorter than a press release and should be sent following a press release, approximately two weeks in advance of your event.
- A media alert should include the company logo, the date and six key points: what, where, when, interview opportunities, contacts and program or business background (very brief explaining what your company does).
- The following should be at the top of page under your logo: \*\*\*Media Alert\*\*\*

### Compose a Post-event Press Release & Prepare Event Photos:

- A post-event press release should highlight the Grand Opening and provide a recap of the event including the number of attendees, names of legislators/dignitaries that attended and event photos.
- Photos are very important for the press release after the event. Make sure several photos are taken of the same thing, in case there is a problem with the image.
- Arrange people by height in photos.
- Zoom in tight with photos for good reproduction, Newspapers usually print in black and white.
- Make sure to write down everyone's name and title before each photo, these will be needed to send to the media for follow-up.
- Email is the least expensive way to send your photos to the media, save all photos in .jpeg format, with the highest resolution.

### STEP 9: Plan For Logistical Needs & Event Materials

- Materials needed for the Grand Opening include: all visuals, awards, checks, documents, gifts, product samples, gift certificates, etc.
- Signage/windows - be sure windows and doors are marked with your logo and hours of operation.
- If you have speakers, you may need a podium, microphone and chairs. Ensure your company logo is displayed prominently. Chairs, tables and linens may also have to be rented.
- Large scissors and ribbon can be provided by your local SBDC for the ribbon cutting.
- If the event includes a groundbreaking, a shovel would be appropriate.
- Think about adverse weather conditions - if hot weather is forecasted, you may want a tent or plan to move the event indoors.
- Directional assistance: use road marker signs with arrows or balloons to guide guests to your location.
- Decorations: flowers, Grand Opening signs, balloons, large display flag, etc.
- Registration: name tags, guest book to collect email address and fishbowl for business cards (great for future customer list). Be sure to have any materials on display to promote your business such as brochures, flyers or other take-a-ways.
- Food and beverages for number of attendees. Plan for enough linens, garbage bags and trash cans. (make sure to place trash cans in strategic locations)
- Plan ahead for any A/V equipment needs and plan in advance to make sure all equipment functions properly. Schedule a run-through and set-up early in the day to ensure functionality.

## SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

[Use company logo or letterhead]

[Date]

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact:**

[Name]

[E-mail address]

[Phone and fax numbers]

**Grand Opening & Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony to Celebrate  
[name of business]**

*[business name] has invited [name of elected official] to attend its ribbon-cutting ceremony on [date].*

[CITY, STATE]—[Business name] is pleased to announce that it will hold a Grand Opening and Ribbon-Cutting ceremony for its [newly constructed/recently renovated] boat launching facility [name of boat launching facility] onsite at [hour] on [date].

“We’re happy to introduce our latest accomplishment to the community and those who helped bring this project to fruition,” said [spokesperson’s name and title]. “The ribbon-cutting ceremony for [Business name] marks the launch of a new era in [city name].”

[Name of elected official], [elected official’s significance to the business], is scheduled to be on hand to offer a few remarks regarding [Business name] and to assist in the ribbon-cutting.

“We’re delighted [name of elected official] has agreed to join our celebration. Our dream of [constructing/greatly improving] this facility was made possible in part by [him/her],” said [your spokesperson’s name].

[Offer specifics on your business facility, such as how many products or selection is available; how much the capacity is; what type and how much parking is available; and other details, such as amenities it offers, final cost of the project and public funding used. If the business site has undergone renovations, include before and after facts].

[Include details on the ribbon-cutting ceremony, such as the names and affiliations of other invited guests, what will take place at the ceremony, and other details].

[Insert other specifics regarding your business facility, such as its significance to the community, and any interesting historical facts related to the site, or other relevant details, make sure to include your company website].

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## SAMPLE MEDIA ALERT

[Use company logo and letterhead]

[Date]

**Contact:**

[Name]

[E-mail address]

[Phone and fax numbers]

**\*\*\*MEDIA ALERT\*\*\***

What: [Your business] Ribbon Cutting  
[Your business] invites the media into their facility to meet/film our new facility

Where: [Your business], [Full street address including zip code]  
[Brief directions]

When: [Date] at [Time]

Interview Opportunities: The media is invited to visit the [Your business] facility and speak to [key attendees].

Contacts: [list at least two key spokespeople for the company and include their name, title, phone and email]

Background: [a brief description of what your company does, include your website at the end of this paragraph]

###



## SAMPLE POST-EVENT PRESS RELEASE

[Use company logo or letterhead]

[Date]

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact:**

[Name]

[E-mail address]

[Phone and fax numbers]

**[name of business] Celebrates Grand Opening in [city]**

*[business name] held its Grand Opening on [date] and is now open for business.*

[CITY, STATE]—[Business name] welcomed more than [number of attendees] at its Grand Opening and Ribbon-Cutting ceremony held on [date]. [List of key contacts, legislators] were present to welcome [business name] to the neighborhood.

[Insert Grand Opening photo from event and add photo captions with names and titles of all included in photo]

“As a small business owner, it is great to see the amount of community support we had for our first day of business,” said [spokesperson’s name and title]. “The Grand Opening represents [the culmination of a lot of: hard work, strategy, etc.] and we are happy to finally welcome customers through our doors.”

[Name of business] will be open on [days of week] from [business hours] and is located at [street address of business].

[Offer specifics on your business facility, such as how many products or selection is available; how much the capacity is; what type and how much parking is available; and other details, such as amenities it offers, final cost of the project and public funding used. If the business site has undergone renovations, include before and after facts].

[Insert other specifics regarding your business facility, such as its significance to the community, and any interesting historical facts related to the site, or other relevant details, make sure to include your company website].

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