



International Association of Commercial Administrators

## ***2019 Merit Award Nomination***

**State of West Virginia**

West Virginia Secretary of State's Office

Business Startup Wizard:

Providing Helpful Guidance to Entrepreneurs for Registering a  
New Business in West Virginia

Project Initiation: February 2018

Project Completion: December 2018

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## Executive Summary

The business registration process can be daunting when you do not know where to start, and the West Virginia Secretary of State's Office has created a valuable new tool to help! The new online tool is available through the West Virginia One Stop Business Portal and aims to simplify the business registration process in West Virginia. The tool is referred to as the Business Startup Wizard and can be accessed at <https://business4.wv.gov>.

The Business Startup Wizard is an interactive tool that provides information and guidance to assist with the planning and registration process in order to efficiently and successfully get a business up and running in West Virginia.

The Business Startup Wizard guides the beginning entrepreneur through an easy to follow Q&A process that collects information about the new business. Upon completion, a customized report is generated that provides cross-agency and cross-government resources the entrepreneur will need, including a scoring system to help decide business formation structure. The application is mobile-responsive and makes the report available for print or download. Topics of information presented on the generated report include:

- Business structure guidance;
- Step by step information for starting and opening your business;
- Important county and city contact information;
- Additional licensing & special registration requirements;
- Business tax information;
- Business insurance information; and
- Employee verification information.

The new tool helps remove the complexity and unknowns and provides guidance on not only where to start but how to efficiently complete the business registration process in West Virginia. The Business Startup Wizard is another example of the ongoing efforts of the West Virginia Secretary of State's Office to provide the very best possible service for the business community.

The West Virginia One Stop Business Portal is the result of a multi-agency collaboration between the West Virginia Secretary of State's Office, WorkForce West Virginia, the West Virginia State Tax Department, and the West Virginia Division of Labor. For more information about the West Virginia One Stop Business Portal or to access the new Business Startup Wizard tool, please visit <https://business4.wv.gov>.

The Business Startup Wizard was developed and created by the West Virginia Secretary of State's Office in partnership with WV.gov.

## Effectiveness

The business registration process can be daunting when you do not know where to start. The West Virginia Secretary of State's Office recognized this need of the business community and responded by creating the interactive Business Startup Wizard tool to support entrepreneurs and business owners by streamlining access to business startup information to make the business registration process in West Virginia as efficient as possible. Additionally, the tool helps increase filing accuracy which leads to time and cost savings for both the entrepreneur and the agencies.

### *Increased Filing Accuracy*

Filing accuracy is very important when registering a new business because requirements can vary depending on the type of business being registered. The guidance provided by the Business Startup Wizard tool helps to eliminate inaccurate filing occurrences during the planning process with simplified, step by step guidance on how to register a business for the applicable business formation type.

### *Customer Time/Cost Savings*

The Business Startup Wizard tool eliminates the time necessary to find and navigate numerous local, state, and federal agency websites to obtain business registration information which saves valuable time for the entrepreneur. Additionally, the guidance provided also helps reduce costs that would otherwise be associated with hiring a professional to complete the preliminary business planning research.

### *Agency Time/Cost Savings*

Inaccurate filings cost agencies time and money. Extra staff time is needed to address filings when inaccurate filings are received and the additional cost of processing changes and/or refunds all add up to more expenses for the entrepreneur and the agency. The Business Startup Wizard tool helps to eliminate these types of mistakes from the get go.

### *Results*

Since launch, 4,122 customized reports have been generated through the online tool, and it is estimated that the simplified and streamlined business registration guidance helps to increase the efficiency of business registration planning and the subsequent filing accuracy by 99.7%!

*\*\*Note: The percentage is based on the average amount of time it would take to visit the numerous local, state, and federal agency websites to obtain business registration information compared to the amount of time needed to complete the Business Startup Wizard survey. 3 minutes or less vs. approximately 3 days at 8 hours per day.*

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## Originality

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The West Virginia Secretary of State Business Startup Wizard tool is exemplar because it is the first in the nation to combine step by step business registration guidance along with business formation structure guidance from cross-agency and cross-government resources into a single, centralized, web-based solution. This new, innovative service concept will streamline and improve the business registration process in West Virginia which is an outcome that any state could duplicate and benefit from. The result is a more streamlined business registration planning process with reduced bureaucracy, a more accurate business filing, and reduced costs for both the entrepreneur and agencies.

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## Significance and Transferability

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The Business Startup Wizard tool provides a major breakthrough to the longstanding problem with the complexity and unknowns of the business registration process which is a problem faced by many states and not unique to West Virginia.

Given that the business registration process is very similar from state to state, any state could easily replicate the tool specifically for their state and realize its benefits.

## Benefits

### *Centralized, Web-based Solution*

The Business Startup Wizard tool is the first in the nation to combine step by step business registration guidance along with business formation structure guidance from cross-agency and cross-government resources into a single, centralized, web-based solution.

### *Improved Filing Accuracy*

The guidance provided by the Business Startup Wizard tool helps to eliminate inaccurate filing occurrences during the planning process with simplified, step by step guidance on how to register a business for the applicable business formation type.

### *Time/Cost Savings*

The new Business Startup Wizard tool eliminates the time necessary for an entrepreneur to find and navigate numerous local, state, and federal agency websites to obtain business registration information, and the streamlined business registration guidance provides for more accurate business filings which saves valuable time and money for both the entrepreneur and agencies.

The helpful guidance provided by the Business Startup tool on not only where to start but how to efficiently complete the business registration process in West Virginia will create efficiencies that compound over time and this is an outcome that any state could duplicate and benefit from.

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## Lessons Learned

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### *Unexpected Issues*

One of the notable issues encountered while in the testing phase for the Business Startup Wizard was related to the content that presents on the generated report specific to the local government agencies and it was twofold, there were a large number of local government agencies that either did not have a website or their website changed after the planning phase had been completed and while the tool was being developed. Correcting the invalid or changed information during the testing phase added a considerable amount of time to the project.

### *Things to Do Differently*

The initial plan for the generated report included over 25 pages of content with 13 different sections which did not support one of the main goals for the new Business Startup Wizard tool which was to create simplified, streamlined guidance on the business registration process. It took 7 iterations to reach the desired level of simplicity and the final product produces a report of 5 pages or less in 7 sections.

### *Advice*

Plan to spend time early in the design process to evaluate what local government data is available online and create default content to present on the report that would be helpful for the entrepreneur in the event there is no online content available. Additionally, the local government data needs to be super easy to update and you need to plan time post launch to review the content on a regular basis to ensure accuracy.

Lastly, refine, refine, refine! Plan to spend time early in the planning process to refine the content for the generated report to ensure that it is simplified, extremely well organized, relevant, and concise.