

How to Start

Business –Merchant Associations and BIDs start with a conversation among neighbors, then another conversation with more neighbors. Here is a typical sequence and timing for setting up a Business – Merchant Association and a Business Improvement District (BID). It may be helpful to know that each of the BID areas in OKC operated as a Business - Merchant Association for several years before deciding to establish a BID.

Business – Merchant Association

The City has dedicated staff and resources to assist with the formation of a Business-Merchant Association.

1. Organize a group of property owners and businesses with interest in working together on common issues and opportunities, such as making the area clean, safe, beautified and occupied. This group can be called a Steering Committee.
2. Draft tentative district boundaries. These initial boundaries may shift a bit based on feedback from all the area’s stakeholders.
3. Contact stakeholders through a combination of small group meetings, 1:1 meetings, and community-style meetings where all tenants and property owners are invited.
4. The Steering Committee and stakeholders reach agreement on a few immediate priorities and action items, commit to meet once a month, incorporate as a neighborhood – business association in the State of Oklahoma, and set a rough outline and budget for the next year. (Timing for Steps 1 – 4: 6 months – 1 year)
5. After incorporation with the State, the business association can form a board of directors, adopt bylaws and terms of membership. Once the bylaws are adopted, apply for a tax-exempt status and a 501(c)6 or (c)4 designation with the IRS. (Timing between Step 4 and 5: Add another 6 months to one year –based on IRS response time.)
6. The association and City staff work together, often with a consultant, to create a strategic plan for the organization and the area. The plan will address the issues and opportunities expressed by stakeholders – such as ideas for district identification and branding, value proposition for membership, capital improvements, events, arts & culture, tourism, and commerce. (Timing to Step 6: Not dependent on IRS and can start strategizing in Step 4. Allow about 6 months to create a strategic plan.)
7. Once the association is up and running, City staff will encourage discussion about forming a BID.

For more information about Business Associations, contact Kim Cooper-Hart at (405) 297-2900 or by email kim.cooper-hart@okc.gov.