Small Business Research Institute

# Small Business Tune Up Kit

Review twelve parts of your business using current records and conversations with the people doing the work. For each area, note what supports your view and what remains unknown. Choose three priorities and turn them into a 90-day action plan with a responsible person, a next step and a review date. This is a working review, not a business health score or professional determination.

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## Use the kit

Work through the twelve areas with current records and the people doing the work. Choose a status and write the evidence behind your answer. Use roles or aliases. Keep confidential business, account, employee and customer details in their appropriate systems.

Status choices: Working well / Needs attention / Don't know / Not applicable. A status is your working view. It is not an independent finding, compliance determination or numerical business health score.

Choose three priorities that deserve the next conversation or action. A gap in evidence can itself be a priority. On the final pages, assign a next step, a responsible person and a review date for each priority.

## Fictional example of a useful priority

Riverton Workshop is a fictional cabinet shop. It reports a profit, but two customer invoices have not been collected. Its coordinator can draft updates, while installation dates still depend on production. The owner has proposed a backup without testing the handoff.

Working priorities: confirm expected collection dates, clarify the production escalation contact, and rehearse one customer-update task. These are planning questions based on the fictional facts; they do not establish the business's financial condition or capability.

Revised 2026 edition. This original SMBRI workbook adapts the twelve-area review approach of the 2013 Small Business Tune Up Kit. The current questions and action workflow are educational planning material.

# Business review areas 1 and 2

## 01 Ownership and business structure

Do the owners have current records of who owns what, who may make which decisions, and what remains unagreed?

Does the business structure still fit the work, ownership arrangements and future plans, and which questions need legal or tax advice?

Have the owners discussed their objectives, a possible transfer of ownership and what would happen if someone could not continue?

Status: Working well / Needs attention / Don't know / Not applicable

**Evidence or source and date**

**What remains unknown or needs attention**

**Possible next action**

Record ownership intentions
https://smbri.org/guides/ownership-foundations#worksheet

## 02 Business planning

Can the team explain who the business serves, why customers choose it and the assumptions behind the current plan?

Are the next priorities tied to named people, available time, resources and dates rather than a list of ambitions?

Does a regular review compare actual results with the plan, explain differences and record what will change?

Status: Working well / Needs attention / Don't know / Not applicable

**Evidence or source and date**

**What remains unknown or needs attention**

**Possible next action**

Run a monthly business review
https://smbri.org/tools/monthly-business-review

# Business review areas 3 and 4

## 03 Business processes

Can someone trace a recurring job from the customer request through delivery, billing and follow-up, including the handoffs?

Are the important checks, approvals and exception routes recorded where the people doing the work can find them?

Has another person tried the instructions, and did you record delays, errors and decisions that still required the owner?

Status: Working well / Needs attention / Don't know / Not applicable

**Evidence or source and date**

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**What remains unknown or needs attention**

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**Possible next action**

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Document and rehearse a process handoff
https://smbri.org/tools/process-handoff

## 04 Accounting and business records

Are the accounting records current enough to explain cash, amounts owed by customers, bills due and recent business results?

Are bank balances and important account balances reconciled, with unusual items checked by someone able to question them?

Can the owner explain why profit differs from cash available, and what evidence supports the next cash forecast?

Status: Working well / Needs attention / Don't know / Not applicable

**Evidence or source and date**

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**What remains unknown or needs attention**

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**Possible next action**

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Build a cash-flow forecast
https://smbri.org/tools/cash-flow-forecast

# Business review areas 5 and 6

## 05 Technology and information

Which recurring tasks cause delays or rework, and have you compared a simpler process with buying or changing software?

Are access permissions, important accounts, renewals and data responsibilities documented, including what happens when someone leaves?

Have you tested restoring needed information from a backup, and can the team work through a technology outage?

Status: Working well / Needs attention / Don't know / Not applicable

**Evidence or source and date**

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**What remains unknown or needs attention**

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**Possible next action**

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Test whether AI fits one task
https://smbri.org/guides/should-ai-handle-this-task

## 06 Marketing, sales and customer relationships

Do you know which customers and needs the business serves, and which evidence supports the reasons they choose you?

Can you follow inquiries through sales, delivery and repeat business, including promises made and complaints that remain unresolved?

How dependent are sales on a few customers, referral sources or channels, and what would happen if one changed?

Status: Working well / Needs attention / Don't know / Not applicable

**Evidence or source and date**

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**What remains unknown or needs attention**

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**Possible next action**

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Review customer and supplier concentration
https://smbri.org/tools/concentration-review

# Business review areas 7 and 8

## 07 Tax and regulation

Who checks which registrations, taxes, permits and employment requirements apply to the business, its locations and its activities?

Is there a current calendar of filings and renewals, with responsible people, supporting records and a way to handle missed deadlines or notices?

Have changes in ownership, workers, locations, sales or products been reviewed with the appropriate qualified advisors?

Status: Working well / Needs attention / Don't know / Not applicable

**Evidence or source and date**

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_____

**What remains unknown or needs attention**

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_____

**Possible next action**

_____

Map questions and advisor responsibilities
https://smbri.org/tools/advisor-team

## 08 Finance and cash management

Does a current forecast show when customer receipts and planned payments are expected, including taxes, debt and owner withdrawals?

Are financing terms, repayment dates, restrictions and personal commitments understood, with questions recorded for the lender or advisor?

Have you tested the effect of slower collections, lower sales or an unexpected cost, and identified actions if cash falls short?

Status: Working well / Needs attention / Don't know / Not applicable

**Evidence or source and date**

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_____

**What remains unknown or needs attention**

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_____

**Possible next action**

_____

Build and test a cash-flow forecast
https://smbri.org/tools/cash-flow-forecast

# Business review areas 9 and 10

## 09 People and employment practices

Are roles, expected results, training and safe working methods clear to the people doing the work?

Who checks that hiring, worker classification, pay, leave and personnel records fit the applicable requirements and handles questions or concerns?

Is there workable backup coverage for essential roles, with time and authority to do the work rather than just a name on a list?

Status: Working well / Needs attention / Don't know / Not applicable

**Evidence or source and date**

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**What remains unknown or needs attention**

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**Possible next action**

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Map owner dependence and backup gaps
https://smbri.org/guides/owner-dependence#worksheet

## 10 Management and leadership

Can people explain which decisions they can make, when to escalate and how decisions and commitments are recorded?

Do managers make time to review progress, give useful feedback and address problems raised by staff or customers?

When work misses the plan or an ethical concern arises, does the team examine what happened and assign a clear next action?

Status: Working well / Needs attention / Don't know / Not applicable

**Evidence or source and date**

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**What remains unknown or needs attention**

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**Possible next action**

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Set actions in a monthly business review
https://smbri.org/tools/monthly-business-review

# Business review areas 11 and 12

## 11 Legal arrangements and obligations

Can the business locate current ownership records, contracts, leases and important permissions, with a responsible custodian for each?

Which terms or obligations need clarification before a renewal, new commitment or ownership change, and who will obtain legal advice?

Are open questions about confidentiality, intellectual property, disputes and authority to sign recorded for the appropriate specialist?

Status: Working well / Needs attention / Don't know / Not applicable

**Evidence or source and date**

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_____

**What remains unknown or needs attention**

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**Possible next action**

_____

Assign questions to the right advisors
https://smbri.org/tools/advisor-team

## 12 Risk and continuity

Which disruptions could stop essential work or harm people, customers, records or assets, and what existing evidence informs that view?

Are response contacts, fallback arrangements and insurance questions documented where the right people can find them during a disruption?

Has the team rehearsed a limited, safe interruption scenario and recorded what still depends on one person, supplier, system or location?

Status: Working well / Needs attention / Don't know / Not applicable

**Evidence or source and date**

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_____

**What remains unknown or needs attention**

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**Possible next action**

_____

Review dependencies and concentration
https://smbri.org/tools/concentration-review

# Your three priorities and 90 day plan

**Business alias and planning date** _____

**Review participants and roles** _____

Choose up to three priorities. State what you want to learn or change, the evidence that would support progress and a date to revisit the plan.

## Priority 1

**Question or gap** _____

**Next action** _____

**Responsible person and target date** _____

**Evidence to bring to the review** _____

**Review date and what could require an earlier review**

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## Priority 2

**Question or gap** _____

**Next action** _____

**Responsible person and target date** _____

**Evidence to bring to the review** _____

**Review date and what could require an earlier review**

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## Priority 3

**Question or gap** _____

**Next action** _____

**Responsible person and target date** _____

**Evidence to bring to the review** _____

**Review date and what could require an earlier review**

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# Example action plan and useful follow ups

The following entries continue the fictional Riverton Workshop example. Names describe fictional roles. No result has been verified.

| Priority and next action | Responsible role | Evidence and review |
|---|---|---|
| Collections: confirm the two invoice records and expected payment dates. | Bookkeeper | A dated receivables list and assumptions for the cash forecast. Review next Friday. |
| Scheduling: identify who can confirm installation dates when the production lead is absent. | Coordinator | Named escalation route and limits on promises. Review at the next weekly meeting. |
| Handoff: ask the proposed backup to prepare a reply from a sample job sheet. | Owner and proposed backup | Observed source checks, exceptions and unresolved permissions. Review after the rehearsal. |

## Keep using the plan

Review actions during a monthly business review. Change the plan when facts, staffing, commitments or priorities change. Retain uncertainty until the relevant records, conversations or tests resolve it.

## Use the record

Continue with the template that fits the priority. The online Tune Up can help you organize the same questions and record your working plan.

Tune Up online
https://smbri.org/tools/small-business-tune-up

Cash flow forecast
https://smbri.org/tools/cash-flow-forecast

Monthly business review
https://smbri.org/tools/monthly-business-review

Process handoff
https://smbri.org/tools/process-handoff

Use this educational workbook for planning and professional conversations. It does not establish legal rights, validate a business, confer a credential or replace qualified advice.