## Licenses and Permits You May Need to Open a Restaurant

This information is offered as a public service and should not be used as a substitute for professional advice. You **must** contact the city/town where your business is located and each licensing agency to ensure you are fully compliant.

### Some minimum licenses and permits you may need to open a restaurant:

1. **Register Your Business** - How you register depends upon your business structure.
   a. If you wish to operate your business through a formal, incorporated business structure such as a Limited Liability Company (LLC), Corporation, Limited Partnership (LP), Limited Liability Partnership (LLP), or Non-Profit Corporation, you will need to register your business with the **RI Department of State**. Find out more at: https://www.sos.ri.gov/divisions/business-services/ri-business/start-your-rhode-island-business

   b. If you do not wish to incorporate a business but plan to use a business name that is different from your legal name (a Sole Proprietorship or General Partnership), you will need to register a **Trade Name** with the **RI Department of State** for each RI city or town in which you will operate. Find out more at: https://www.sos.ri.gov/divisions/business-services/ri-trade-names

2. **Employer Identification Number (EIN)** - is also known as a Federal Tax Identification Number assigned by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and it is essentially a tax identification number used to identify a business entity. Generally, businesses need an EIN. You may apply for an EIN in various ways, including online through the IRS website at https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/ apply-for-an-employer-identification-number-ein-online, or by fax, phone, or mail. This is a free service offered by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

3. **Business License** - This license gives you permission to operate your restaurant. You may need a business license from the city or town where your restaurant will be located. That means the license needs to be associated with the address of your restaurant. Contact the clerk's office in the municipality where your business will be located.

4. **Victualling license** – Pursuant to RIGL 5-24-1, a "victualing house" is a business where food is prepared and/or consumed on the premises. A municipality has the power to regulate, including the setting of hours of operation, by granting a license. You will need to contact the municipality where your establishment will be located to obtain a victualing license if applicable. In addition to a Victualing License here are some other licenses/permits your restaurant might need from a municipality:
   a. **Liquor License (if applicable) -** This license gives you permission to sell alcohol. Your food business license with the RIDOH will **not** cover the liquor you intend to sell. You will want to start this process early if you intend to sell alcohol as liquor licensing authorities usually have various levels of license approval and it could take several months to get a license if there are any available. Contact the

municipality in the city or town where your business will be located for more information, and to determine if this type of license is available in your municipality.

b. **Pool Table/Amusement License -** Licenses are required if you want pool tables, juke boxes, pinball, etc. Contact the municipality for more information. There may be limits on how many are allowed, and the hours of operation.

c. **Live Entertainment and Music License –** You may need a license from the local municipality if you plan on featuring live music. If your establishment is large enough, you may even need to pay for licensure to play music over a radio system. Check with the local municipality for guidance.

5. **Alcohol Server Training Certification (if serving alcohol)** – Any person who sells or serves alcoholic beverages; anyone serving in a supervisory capacity over those who sell or serve alcoholic beverages; anyone whose job description entails the checking of identification for the purchase of alcoholic beverages; and valet parking staff are required by law to possess a server permit. To obtain a server permit, individuals must successfully complete a **certified alcohol server training** program.
**Here is a link to a List of RI Certified Alcohol Server Training Programs**:
https://dbr.ri.gov/real-estate-and-commercial-licensing/liquor

6. **Certificate of Water Quality or Approved Public Water Supply** –
   a. **City or Town water supply** - If your establishment is on a city or town public water supply system you will need to know the name of the municipal water supply system for the RIDOH Food Service application and be able to show a water bill or a certificate from the supplier.
   b. **On-site Well or Public Water System (PWS)** - If the establishment receives its water supply from an on-site well, you will need to provide a Public Water System (PWS) License and submit a copy of the certificate of compliance issued from the RIDOH, Center for Drinking Water Quality. If the establishment is not on a Public Water System (PWS) of record, **contact the RIDOH, Center for Drinking Water Quality** for further guidance.
   For information/application: http://www.health.ri.gov/programs/detail.php?pgm_id=158
   or call (401) 222-6867.

7. **Wastewater Discharge Permit (Sewer Permit/Letter) or Approved Onsite Wastewater Treatment System (OWTS)** –
   a. **Sewer system** - If the business is on a public sewer system, you will need to obtain a sewer permit/letter. You will need to know or determine if you are connected to a municipal sewage treatment facility or to the Narragansett Bay Commission (NBC) sewage system. To obtain a new permit, contact and/or submit an application to the appropriate entity.
   **List of Wastewater Treatment Facilities:**
   http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/water/wwtf/wwtf-officials.php

   b. **Wastewater Discharge Permit** - some types of businesses may need to pretreat wastewater discharge before it enters the sewer system. Contact and/or submit an application to the appropriate entity, which would be either a municipal sewage treatment facility or the Narragansett Bay Commission depending on the jurisdiction the business is located in. The design of a pretreatment system may require hiring a professional engineer. The installation of grease removal equipment may be required. The local sewer authority can advise you of what may be required. **List of wastewater treatment facilities, locations, and officials in charge of the facility:**
   http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/water/wwtf/wwtf-officials.php

c. **Onsite Wastewater Treatment System (OWTS)** - If the business is on a private wastewater disposal system, for example, you have **an existing on-site sewage disposal system** (not on public sewers) and you need to verify that the system it suitable for your needs, you can request from the RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM), to have a system suitability determination by submitting a **System Suitability Determination application** to the RIDEM. Application forms can be obtained from the DEM OWTS Permitting Program by visiting www.dem.ri.gov/programs/water/owts/.

   This process may require hiring a licensed OWTS designer/installer and/or a professional engineer –
   For a list of approved OWTS professionals:
   https://dem.ri.gov/environmental-protection-bureau/water-resources/professional-licensing/owts-professional-licensing

   For large projects that may involve more than one permit, for applicants that are not familiar with the DEM's permitting process, or for any applicant that may have questions about permitting their project, you may want to consider arranging a pre-application meeting with the DEM, Office of Customer and Technical Assistance. For more information go to:
   http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/customertech/preapp-meeting.php.

   A copy of the approved application may need to be submitted to the RIDOH, Center of Food Protection, as part of the RIDOH application package, as well as the seating capacity and any other limitations imposed by RIDEM.

   **If a new sewage disposal system is needed**, submit an application to RIDEM for construction of a new Onsite Wastewater Treatment System (OWTS). The design of an OWTS would require hiring a licensed OWTS designer/installer and/or professional engineer (see links to lists in above paragraph). A copy of the **Certificate of Conformance** issued by RIDEM may need to be submitted to the RIDOH, Center for Food Protection as part of the RIDOH Food Service license application package.

8. **RIDOH Food Service License** - You will need a food service license from the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) to serve food. Determine the applicable application for your establishment. If you are doing new construction or if the cost of renovations will exceed 50 percent (50%) of the value of the establishment, you will also need to complete the **RIDOH New Construction or Renovations** application along with the Food Service application. List of some of the RIDOH Food Service applications:
   https://health.ri.gov/food-safety/food-protection-center

9. **RIDOH Food Safety Manager License** – This ensures you and your workers meet the RIDOH requirements for proper food sanitation, storage, protection and preparation. Individuals must first successfully complete a certified Food Safety training course and pass an examination, where they will receive a certificate of training as proof they completed the course. Then submit a RIDOH application for **Manager Certified in Food Safety** http://www.health.ri.gov/applications/FoodSafetyManager.pdf along with your certificate of training to the RIDOH, Center for Food Protection. Upon successful application approval, you will become registered and licensed with the RIDOH and receive a RIDOH Certification of Manager in Food Safety. Review the Health Department regulations to find out if you need to meet this requirement: **RI Regulation for Certification of Managers in Food Safety:** https://rules.sos.ri.gov/regulations/part/216-50-10-2
   For a list of approved Food Safety Training Programs visit the RIDOH website at:
   https://health.ri.gov/food-safety-manager-training (*Then go to the "Classroom Training/Examination" tab*).

10. **RI Retail Sales Tax Permit –** This permit allows you to collect and remit sales tax to the RI Division of Taxation. For a new business, you would need to complete the RI Division of Taxation **Business Application and Registration (BAR)** form https://tax.ri.gov/resources/businesses/registration.

    This is a comprehensive application used to register your business for the following: Permit to make sales at retail, income tax withholding account, RI unemployment insurance account (including Rhode Island temporary disability insurance (TDI) and Rhode Island job development fund tax). The registration for a permit to make sales at retail (including cigarette license, gasoline license) will require registration fees.

11. **"Letters" of Good Standing (LOGS) (tax status)** - You may need to obtain a "**Letter" of Good Standing** from the **RI Division of Taxation** indicating that you are a taxpayer in good standing and you do not owe any outstanding taxes to the State of Rhode Island. This may be required in order to register your business with the local municipality. This could take four (4) weeks to obtain, so plan accordingly.
    How to request a **"Letter" of Good Standing** - complete a request form for a **Letter of Good Standing** (https://tax.ri.gov/tax-sections/compliance-collections/letter-good-standing-logs)
    Mail your request to: Letter of Good Standing, Compliance & Collections, RI Division of Taxation, One Capitol Hill, Providence, RI 02908 or call (401) 574-8941 for more information.
    - **Payment:** Make your check payable to: **RI Division of Taxation**
    - **Fee:** $50

    **"Letter" of Good Standing or "Certificate" of Good Standing, which one do I need?**
    https://tax.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur541/files/2025-07/LOGS%20or%20COGS%202025%20.pdf

12. **RI New Hire Reporting Form –** Visit the following link for information and registration: https://ri-newhire.com/law. General rule on reporting. On or before the effective date of employment, a new employee must complete a W-4 form as is required by both Rhode Island and Federal law. Internal Revenue Code Section 3402 (8) (2) (A). Within fourteen (14) days of the employee's effective date of employment or effective date of reinstatement, the employer must submit to the department of administration, division of taxation or its designee, the information as provided in section 15-24-5 of the RI General Laws.

## Other Licenses and Permits Your Restaurant Might Need

1. **Building Permit from local municipality for new construction or renovations –** Normally permits are required from the municipal building or zoning official for most work being done on a property including repairs to the building, plumbing, electrical or mechanical systems. Contact the building or zoning official in the municipality where your business will be located to find out if you will need any building permits based upon your business plans.
2. **Zoning Certificate -** You may apply for a zoning certificate for a business or a property use classification. The Certificate will ensure that your proposed use is consistent with local zoning laws before you sign a lease or purchase and sales agreement. The municipality can also advise you whether or not your type of business is allowed within a specific location and inform you of any possible building codes which may need to be addressed.
3. **Physical Alteration Permit (PAP)** – If altering any state-owned road/highway rights-of-way, such as for curb cuts, sidewalks, stormwater disposal, signage, traffic signals, etc., a **Physical Alteration Permit (PAP)** from the RI Department of Transportation (RIDOT) would be needed. This permit allows permission for alterations, by Physical Alteration Permit, within state roads/highway rights-of-way (ROW).

**Link to State RIDOT PAP Manual:** https://rules.sos.ri.gov/regulations/part/290-20-00-4
**Link to State RIDOT PAP Application & Instructions**: http://www.dot.ri.gov/business/index.php#permit
Plan accordingly since this application process may take several months to obtain, and an engineer may be necessary to draft certified plans depending on the complexity of the project. If alterations are made within any city-owned road rights-of-way, a similar Physical Alteration Permit may be required at the local level by the local municipality. In this case, check with the local municipality, either the building official, department of public works, or highway department for requirements.

4. **Certificate of Occupancy –** Normally issued by the municipal building or zoning official upon final inspection of work performed on a property under a building permit to provide certification that your building is constructed and maintained according to code.

5. **Sign Permit -** Most municipalities have ordinances for outdoor signage, including location, size and lighting. Before you order your carefully designed restaurant sign, you may need a permit and make sure it's compliant. Contact the building or zoning official in the municipality where your business will be located to find out what permits you may need.

6. **Rhode Island Lottery Sales License -** This license gives you permission to sell lottery games. The license is issued by the Rhode Island Lottery Licensing Division. For more information: https://www.rilot.com/en-us/retailers-corner.html

7. **Crowd Control/Management License** – The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 101 Life Safety Code requires all places of assembly (where 50 or more individuals could legally assemble) to have at least one certified crowd manager or crowd manager supervisor. This applies to restaurants as well. This program is designed to train employers and employees in basic crowd management techniques to comply with the state fire code. Crowd manager training is offered through the Rhode Island State Fire Marshal's Office. For a list of course offerings, visit: https://fire-marshal.ri.gov/safety-information-public-programs/crowd-management. Individuals who successfully complete a crowd management training session are issued a 5-year license from the Rhode Island Office of the State Fire Marshal.

**Link to a list of municipality websites:** http://www.ri.gov/towns/