

# How to Open a Catering Business in California: A Legal Checklist

## Step 1: Register Your Business

- Choose a business structure (LLC, sole proprietorship, corporation)
- Register your business with the California Secretary of State
- Obtain an Employer Identification Number (EIN) from the IRS
- Apply for a California Seller's Permit through the CDTFA

## Step 2: Obtain Business Licenses and Permits

- Secure a general business license from your local city or county
- Obtain a food handler's permit for all employees
- Get a health permit from your local Environmental Health Department
- If using a commercial kitchen, obtain necessary health inspection approvals

## Step 3: Apply for a Caterer's Permit from the ABC

- Determine if you need a Type 58 (Retail Caterer) or Type 91 (Beer Manufacturer) Permit
- Complete and submit Form ABC-239 to your nearest ABC office
- Pay the annual permit fee (varies by location and license type)
- Await permit approval from ABC headquarters

## Step 4: Obtain Catering Authorization for Events

- Apply for a Type 58 or Type 91 catering authorization for each event
- Submit Form ABC-218 (for Type 58) or ABC-218-BMC (for Type 91)
- Pay the per-event fee based on estimated attendance
- Get necessary approvals from property owners and law enforcement (if required)

## Step 5: Comply with Alcohol Service Regulations

- Ensure staff has Responsible Beverage Service (RBS) training and certification
- Follow all ABC alcohol service laws and event restrictions

- Print and have the catering authorization document available at the event

#### Step 6: Obtain Insurance Coverage

- General liability insurance
- Liquor liability insurance (if serving alcohol)
- Workers' compensation insurance (if hiring employees)
- Commercial auto insurance (if using vehicles for catering)

#### Step 7: Prepare for Health and Safety Inspections

- Maintain a clean, inspected commercial kitchen or commissary
- Follow California Food Code requirements
- Keep detailed food handling and storage logs

#### Step 8: Market Your Catering Business

- Register a DBA (Doing Business As) if needed
- Build a website and online presence
- Partner with event planners and venues
- Secure contracts for corporate and private events