

6 Steps to Begin Exporting

Step 1 Take the Free Export Readiness Self-Assessment

Since exporting requires an extension of a firm's resources, it is important that you first assess your export potential. To begin, take the [online questionnaire](#) offered by the federal government to help assess your export readiness and to direct you towards available resources.

Step 2 Training and Counseling

The U.S. Commercial Service, which is the trade promotion arm of the U.S. Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration, has trade professionals in over 100 U.S. cities and in more than 75 countries. This network of export and industry specialists provides counseling and a variety of products and services to assist small and mid-sized U.S. businesses export their products and services. Each U.S. Export Assistance Center is staffed by professionals from the SBA, the U.S. Department of Commerce, the U.S. Export-Import Bank, and other public and private organizations. Firms can begin by locating the nearest [Export Assistance Center](#). The Small Business Administration also has a list of centers with [SBA representatives](#).

Step 3 Create an Export Business Plan

Creating an export business plan is important for defining your company's present status, internal goals and commitment, and is required if you plan to seek export financing assistance. You learn how to develop an export plan by assembling facts, identifying constraints and setting specific goals and objectives as milestones to success. Export.gov provides a [sample outline](#) to help begin developing an export plan.

Step 4 Conduct Market Research

Use market research to learn your product's potential in a given market, where the best prospects exist for success, and common business practices. The [Market Research Library](#) is the U.S. government's repository of the latest information prepared by commercial and economic experts in U.S. embassies worldwide. The Library contains more than 100,000 industry and country-specific market reports including country commercial guides, industry overviews, market updates, and industry/regional reports.

[Trade Stats Express](#), a service provided by the International Trade Administration (ITA), is a powerful tool for identifying target markets.

Step 5 Find Buyers

The U.S. Department of Commerce can help exporters identify and qualify leads for potential buyers, distributors, joint venture partners, and licensees from both private and public sources.

BuyUSA.gov Matchmaking is a convenient online program of the U.S. Commercial Service that matches U.S. exporters with buyers and importers in overseas markets. On the basis of the profiles that companies send to BuyUSA.gov, U.S. exporters receive the information that they need to contact potential importers in the overseas markets they select.

The Gold Key Matching Service is a fee-based service available to U.S.-based companies to introduce U.S.-made products to potential agents, distributors, sales representatives, association and government contacts, licensing or joint venture partners, end-users and other strategic business partners in the U.S. company's targeted export market.

Typically the U.S. company applies through their closest U.S. Export Assistance Center in the United States, which forwards the information about the client company and its products to one of the U.S. Commercial Service offices located in a U.S. embassy or consulate outside the United States. There, a commercial specialist, assistant or contractor under the supervision of a U.S. Commercial Service officer will research potential business partners, select the most promising according to such factors as matching product lines, reputation and country coverage, provide the U.S. company's representative with an appointment schedule of one or more days of one-on-one meetings in the foreign country, and accompany the U.S. representative to the meetings.

Information about these and other buyer finding programs can be found at your regional [Export Assistance Center](#).

Step 6 Investigate Financing Your Small Business Exports, Foreign Investment or Projects

Trade Adjustment Assistance for Firms (TAA), a federal program, provides financial assistance to manufacturers affected by import competition. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Commerce, this cost sharing federal assistance program pays for half the cost of consultants or industry-specific experts for projects that improve a manufacturer's competitiveness, including export development. Firms may begin by contacting one of eleven regional [Trade Adjustment Assistance Centers \(TAACs\)](#).

The SBA also offers loan guaranty programs that enable the small business exporter to obtain working capital to finance pre- and post-shipment needs, increase global competitiveness, enhance their ability to export a product or service, and financing for the acquisition of long-term fixed assets.

SBA Export Express

The Export Express loan program provides working capital and/or fixed asset financing for companies that will begin or expand exporting. Begin by finding approved lenders participating in the [SBA Export Express lenders](#).

The Export Working Capital Program

The Export Working Capital Program provides financing to support export orders or the export transaction cycle, from purchase order to final payment. Begin by finding approved lenders participating in the [SBA Export Working Capital Program](#).

The International Trade Loan Program

The International Trade Loan Program provides long-term financing to support companies that are expanding because of growing export sales or have been adversely impacted by imports and need to modernize to meet foreign competition. Begin by finding approved lenders participating in the SBA [International Trade Loan Program](#).