

Tips and To Dos for Opening a Law Office in South Carolina

NOTIFICATIONS/REGISTRATIONS

- ☐ Provide SC Supreme Court with correct contact info by logging into your AIS (Attorney Information System) account www.sccourts.org/AIS. The South Carolina Bar, the Bar Foundation, and the Commission on CLE are automatically notified when you update your status and address in the AIS system. For assistance using AIS, call (855)235-2500 or email aissupport@sccourts.org.)
- ☐ Choose a firm name. In AIS, if your firm is new, the firm name will not appear in the drop-down list in AIS and you must submit it to be added. In SC, the Bar does not need to approve your firm name but it should comply with the South Carolina Rules of Professional Conduct for firm names.
- ☐ Incorporate with SC Secretary of State (forms online) (you do not need to file a copy with the SC Bar)
- ☐ If you register with the Secretary of State after January 1, 2024, you have 90 days to file your initial beneficial ownership information with FinCEN <https://www.fincen.gov/boi>
- ☐ Choose an office location. If sharing an office, consult ethics rules and opinions.
- ☐ Obtain city and/or county business license for your office
- ☐ Rent Post Office Box
- ☐ Apply to be a Notary <https://sos.sc.gov/services-and-filings/notaries>
- ☐ Business Cards
- ☐ Website and domain name
- ☐ Join the SC Bar's Solo and Small Firm Section and the Solofirm listserv to network with other small firm lawyers www.scbar.org/solo
- ☐ Sign up for SC Bar Lawyer Referral Service (need 2 years of legal experience)
- ☐ If you're a solo, make an agreement with another lawyer to be your emergency backup or successor. Add their name to the Successor Registry on SCBar.org or on your license fee statement.
- ☐ Make a list to help a successor or receiver quickly and temporarily act in your place and touch base with your backup at least annually.
- ☐ Contact the SC Bar's Practice Management Assistance Program (PMAP) with any questions you have about starting a law practice: pmap@scbar.org

LAW OFFICE FINANCIALS

- ☐ Seek expert advice from a CPA and/or business lawyer
- ☐ Open a trust account (IOLTA) and operating/business account. SC Bar Foundation handles IOLTA <https://scbarfoundation.org/iolta/>.
- ☐ Give bank IOLTA Enrollment Form and bank directive regarding reporting insufficient funds to the ODC and keep copies (sample NSF letter www.scbar.org/pmap in Forms)
- ☐ Rent safe deposit box at bank



- ☐ Apply for a firm credit card
- ☐ Order checks, deposit slips. Order different colors for operating account and trust account
- ☐ Set up law firm credit card merchant account for client payments (LawPay discount available to Bar members. Most practice management software includes payment processing designed for lawyer trust accounts.)
- ☐ Purchase *Trust Accounting for South Carolina Lawyers* (2021) by Barbara M. Seymour from the SC Bar
- ☐ Consider purchasing practice management software with accounting functions
- ☐ Review SCACR 407 (R. 1.15 Safekeeping Property), SCACR 417 (Financial Recordkeeping), SCACR 412 (IOLTA)

SOFTWARE

- ☐ Review software options at www.scbar.org/pmap
- ☐ Find discounts: www.scbar.org/lawyers/member-benefits-assistance/

OFFICE EQUIPMENT/SERVICES/SUPPLIES

- ☐ Photocopier/High volume scanner/printer (a lease with service, toner and supplies is a customary choice for law firms)
- ☐ Shredder
- ☐ Internet Service Provider (ISP) and other utilities
- ☐ Phone service
- ☐ Domain name and email address (subscription Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace includes email hosting)
- ☐ Answering system, answering service, or virtual receptionist
- ☐ Postage scale, lease postage meter or use online mail service

RESEARCH

- ☐ Fastcase legal research is FREE for Bar members. www.scbar.org/fastcase
- ☐ Fastcase has many SC Bar digital publications for sale
- ☐ SC Bar Book Store for SC law books <https://cle.scbar.org/>
- ☐ Borrow practice management books from the Bar's Lending Library www.scbar.org/lendinglibrary

INSURANCE PROTECTION

- ☐ Professional (malpractice) liability
- ☐ Cybersecurity
- ☐ Auto Insurance for business use
- ☐ Property (liability, wind, fire, earthquake, etc.)
- ☐ Business Interruption
- ☐ Loss of valuable documents
- ☐ Health, Dental, Life and Disability Insurance