

# How to Start and Run a Business Plan Workgroup

The best way to work through the *Passion, Plan Profit* workbook (and the most likely way to actually finish it), is to do it with other people, and stick to a weekly schedule until the plan is finished. See the document called “Business Plan Completion Schedule” at [www.claritytobusiness.com](http://www.claritytobusiness.com) for a suggested schedule.

There are two ways to do this work: find a partner and do it with him/her, or, better yet, find a group of people and do it together.

## Who Makes a Good Partner?

If you want to do it with just one other person, here are some suggestions of people who might make good partners:

1. **Find someone in your niche/industry, who isn't in your geographic area.** If you are a member of a business association (like the National Association of Professional Whatever), find someone in your group with a business similar to yours, whom you don't compete against, and do it with them. You'll probably have to meet over the phone, but you may be of great help to each other, since your businesses are so similar.
2. **Find someone in your town who has a different business than yours, but who serves the same customers.** For instance: a wedding photographer, together with a wedding planner, or a florist, or a wedding dress shop owner, or a wedding venue. (This set of people would make a great group to do the workbook with; see below for how to start a group like this).
3. **Find someone in, or outside your area, with a completely different business than yours.** Even though it's counterintuitive, sometimes you can get your best ideas (especially marketing ideas) from another business owner who is totally outside your niche. Do you see someone at your networking group, or your Rotary or Kiwanis group, or your church/synagogue/mosque whom you'd like to work with just because you like them? Ask them to work with you.
4. **Choose a partner who sticks to things until they're finished.** This is especially important if you are a person who likes to start things, but has a hard time finishing them.

Once you've figured out whom to work with, follow these steps:

1. **Sign the Business Plan Workgroup Participant Agreement (see the one attached to this document).** Although you couldn't base a lawsuit on the document attached to this sheet (thank goodness), signing it will remind you both of the commitments you are making to each other; that the data you're disclosing to each other is sensitive, and that you are both promising to keep it confidential.
2. **Don't meet at anyone's place of business.** It's hard enough to do this work. If you meet at either person's business location, that person is bound to be interrupted. The whole idea behind this is to set aside uninterrupted time to do the work together.
3. **Set out your whole schedule in advance.** It's a lot easier to plan around the meetings when you know about them far in advance.

It's even more motivating to do your business plan in a group, although the logistics can be more complex. If you decide you want to do this, here are the guidelines:

### **How to Create a Business Plan Group**

1. **Don't pick more than six people.** It's also good to pick an even number of people, since you will be pairing off to share your work. More than six is unwieldy, and it's also difficult to find a place to meet, unless you meet at each others' place of business. Which leads to item #2:
2. **Don't meet at anyone's place of business.** It's hard enough to do this work. If you meet at someone's business, that person is bound to be interrupted. The whole idea behind this is to set aside uninterrupted time to do the work together.
3. **Enroll a variety of people with different businesses.** If you're doing it in person, don't choose two people who have the same type of business; they will be reluctant to share their real business numbers with their competitors.
4. **Sign the Business Plan Workgroup Participant Agreement (see the one attached to this document).** Although you couldn't base a lawsuit on the document attached to this sheet, signing it will remind everyone of their commitments; including that the data you're disclosing to each other is sensitive, and that you are promising to keep it confidential.
5. **See the suggestions under "What Makes a Good Partner" above** to help you pick the people in your group.

### **How to Set up and Run the Meetings**

1. Spend the first 20 minutes of the first meeting hashing out the rules; see below for the things you should cover.

2. Meet weekly. Set the date and time and STICK TO IT. Messing around with the date and time introduces chaos and will make it harder for you to finish.
3. Get everyone to agree to the schedule, and to do the homework. It's goofy, but you can even ask everyone to raise their right hand and promise that they will do the homework. This will help everyone realize that the group is serious about finishing. If you meet at a coffee shop, you can impose the "whoever didn't do the homework has to buy for the partner/whole group" rule. Make it expensive for the transgressor so they feel the incentive to pay the penalty only once. Or collect the late fee and save it for the party you're going to have at the end when you finish.
4. You can either do the homework during your group or partner meeting; or do it at home and bring the results to the meeting. Look at the document "Business Plan Completion Schedule" at [www.claritytobusiness.com](http://www.claritytobusiness.com) for information about how long each module takes to do and to discuss.
5. Divide the sharing time evenly between each participant. Be serious about this to the point of getting a timer or having someone time it formally. Equal sharing of time creates group harmony.
6. Create a penalty for latecomers and no-shows. I'm in a mastermind group that charges \$20 if you are even one minute late, and \$25 if you miss. These amounts may be too onerous, especially for a group or a partnership of people who will only be together for a few months, but at least make it clear that you intend to start and end on time.
7. Pick a leader for each session, unless you, as the organizer, want to do it yourself. Lead or delegate that task to someone else. Make sure someone is in charge each session.
8. **Celebrate when you finish.** Have a party; if you charged people fines for being late or not showing up, use the money to buy refreshments. It is a BIG DEAL to finish your business plan. You've just become a member of a privileged club, whose other members are primarily high-rolling venture capitalists and their clients. Welcome to the business elite.
9. Consider meeting once a month as a group after you've finished, to review your business plans. *Passion Plan Profit* contains monthly and quarterly review forms. You'll find that the minute the ink dries on your plan things will begin to change; the best way to adapt is to review your plan and change it as your market and your customers dictate.
10. I lead business plan workgroups over the phone throughout the year. If you don't want to organize your own group, go to [www.claritytobusiness.com](http://www.claritytobusiness.com) for a schedule of these groups and the registration form. **Good luck!**

## Business Plan Workgroup Participant Agreement

1. I agree to be on time for our meetings.
2. I agree to show up to every meeting unless there is an unavoidable problem. "Work" does not count as an unavoidable problem.
3. I agree to stick with the group throughout the whole business plan writing process, until we finish.
4. I agree to pay a fine of \_\_\_\_\_ if I am late. I agree to pay a fine of \_\_\_\_\_ if I do not show up, even if I have a good excuse.
5. I agree to keep confidential everything that is discussed in this business plan workgroup. This confidentiality will continue into perpetuity (i.e. even after the group finishes).

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date