

We frequently hear from small business owners wrestling with sticky legal problems. And while we are always happy to talk with them about their issues, we will often advise that it would be prudent to get an attorney involved. For one, you can avoid major problems by seeking out competent counsel to assist you in writing out contracts, negotiating with difficult parties, or in navigating complex regulatory regimes. And while the NFIB Legal Center can often provide some general guidance, you will need to work with an attorney—licensed in your state—if you need concrete legal advice.



Here are a few tips to keep in mind for finding an attorney:

1

Be proactive, not reactive. You should seek out counsel whenever you believe your legal rights to be in jeopardy. For example, if you are negotiating an important contract, executing a legal instrument, or trying to navigate a complex regulatory regime, you may be wise to seek out counsel. This is especially true if you are seeking to appeal an administrative decision denying a permit, or imposing regulatory penalties and fines. And you should always seek out legal counsel when hit with a lawsuit or enforcement act.

2

Don't sit on your rights. Remember that the clock is ticking and that if you wait too long, you may waive legal claims or defenses that you might otherwise be able to present in court. Accordingly, it's advisable to seek out counsel early if possible. The longer you wait, the greater your risk.

3

Ask around for personal references. Often the best way to find a good attorney is through word of mouth. It may be wise to start by asking friends, relatives, business associates and or other small business owners in your community if they might have recommendations for a good attorney.

4

You want someone with special expertise. You shouldn't assume that just any attorney will do. It may be that you've worked with someone in the past who was perfectly competent to advise you on a contractual matter, or to handle a collections issue—but they might not be the best attorney for you if you are hit with a slip-and-fall suit, or a lawsuit seeking back-wages or raising other employment law issues. So you should seek out someone who specifically has experience dealing with the sort of issues with which you are wrestling.

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Your attorney might have a specific recommendation. If you have worked with an attorney in the past, it's always a good idea to consult them first. He or she will probably be connected with others in the legal community and should be able to point you toward someone (or a firm) with expertise on the issues you are facing.

6

Google can help. You can almost invariably find a comprehensive list of attorneys in your area through a quick Google search. You can even narrow down the search by specifying that you are looking for someone with experience in employment or environmental law, or dealing with collections or contractual disputes, or general commercial litigation. But you may also stumble across subject matter experts simply by searching for online content discussing the legal issues you are facing. For example, many law firms operate legal blogs that discuss important legal developments. And of course, you may also find online ratings for some attorneys on sites such as Avvo.com.

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Avvo is a helpful tool. Just because someone has passed the bar does not mean that they are a good attorney. So it may be advisable to look for online information about an attorney you are considering. For example, Avvo.com rates attorneys in a similar fashion to Yelp. This is just another tool to help you make more intelligent choices as a consumer.

8

Don't Feel Confined by Geography. While you will want an attorney licensed in your state, you do not necessarily need to feel bound to working with someone in your locality. In some cases there may be a benefit to working with someone more locally; however, in this modern age, it's common to work with an attorney without ever meeting in person. For that matter, it may be advisable to seek out an attorney in a more urban center if you are looking for someone with specialized knowledge. While you may be able to find an attorney in almost any community to advise on the most basic of legal issues, the more niche or complex the issue, the more likely it may be that you will want to expand your search to include larger legal markets.

9

Smaller is Sometimes Better. There are undoubtedly benefits to working with a larger firm if you can afford their rates. But, you should not hesitate to contact multiple firms to compare their rates. For that matter, we often find that smaller boutique and mid-sized firms provide better value to small business owners.

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Consult your state bar. If you are feeling stumped, you can also turn to your state bar. Most offer free attorney referral services, which can be especially helpful if you've never had experience seeking out legal counsel. Find your state's attorney referral service below:

- Alabama – <https://www.alabar.org/contact/>
- Alaska – https://www.alaskabar.org/servlet/content/lawyer_referral_serv.html
- Arizona – <http://www.azbar.org/FindALawyer>
- Arkansas – <http://mx.arkbar.com/ARKANSASFINDALAWYER.aspx>
- California – <http://www.calbar.ca.gov/Public/LawyerReferralServicesLRS.aspx>
- Colorado – <http://www.cobar.org/Find-a-lawyer>
- Connecticut – <http://www.ctbar.org/?page=LookingForAnAttorney>
- Delaware – <http://apps.americanbar.org/legalservices/lris/directory/main.cfm?id=DE>
- Florida – <https://www.floridabar.org/member/lrs/>

- Georgia – <https://www.gabar.org/barrules/ethicsandprofessionalism/referral-service.cfm>
- Hawaii - <http://hawaii.lawyerreferral.com/>
- Idaho - https://isb.idaho.gov/member_services/lrs/about_lrs.html
- Illinois – <https://www.isba.org/resources/lawyerfinderforms>
- Indiana – http://www.inbar.org/?page=local_bars
- Iowa – http://www.americanbar.org/portals/public_resources/aba_home_front/directory_programs/iowa.html
- Kansas – https://www.ksbar.org/page/lrs_public
- Kentucky – <https://www.kybar.org/page/lawreferserv>
- Louisiana – <https://www.lsba.org/public/lawyerreferral.aspx>
- Maine – <http://www.mainebar.org/page/AttorneyRequest>
- Maryland – <http://www.msba.org/public/lawyer-referral.aspx>
- Massachusetts – <http://www.massbar.org/for-the-public/need-a-lawyer>
- Michigan – <https://www.michbar.org/LRS/Intro/Lawyer-Referral-Service>
- Minnesota – <http://www.mnbar.org/member-directory/find-a-lawyer>
- Mississippi – <https://www.msbar.org/>
- Missouri – <http://www.mobar.org/forthepublic/findalawyer.htm>
- Montana – <http://www.montanalawhelp.org/organization/lawyer-referral-and-information-service/the-legal-system/attorneys>
- Nebraska – http://www.americanbar.org/portals/public_resources/aba_home_front/directory_programs/nebraska.html
- Nevada – <https://www.nvbar.org/lawyerreferral/lawyer-referral-information-service/>
- New Hampshire - <https://www.nhbar.org/lawyer-referral/>
- New Jersey – <https://lsnj.lawhotline.org/LawyerReferral.aspx>
- New Mexico – https://www.nmbar.org/Nmstatebar/For_Public/Lawyer_Referral.aspx
- New York – <http://www.nycbar.org/get-legal-help/>
- North Carolina – <https://www.ncbar.org/members/lawyer-referral-service/>
- North Dakota – <https://www.sband.org/LRS/>
- Ohio – <http://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/AttySvcs/LawyerReferral/>
- Oklahoma – <http://www.okbar.org/public/LegalServices/LawyerReferralServicesInOklahoma.aspx>
- Oregon – <http://www.oregonstatebar.org/public/ris/>
- Pennsylvania – <http://www.pabar.org/site/Public/lrsblurb>
- Rhode Island – <https://www.ribar.com/lrs/referral.aspx>
- South Carolina – <https://www.scbar.org/public/get-legal-help/find-lawyer-or-mediator/>
- South Dakota – <http://www.statebarofsouthdakota.com/p/cm/ld/fid=54>
- Tennessee – <http://www.tba.org/info/find-an-attorney>
- Texas – <https://www.texasbar.com/Content/NavigationMenu/ForThePublic/DoYouNeedALawyer/CertifiedLawyerReferralServices1/default.htm>
- Utah – <http://www.utahbar.org/directories/find-a-utah-lawyer/>
- Vermont – <https://www.vtbar.org/LRS/>
- Virginia – <http://www.vsb.org/vlrs/>
- Washington – <http://www.wsba.org/Resources-and-Services/Find-Legal-Help>
- Washington DC – <http://badc.org/public-services/lrs/>
- West Virginia – <http://www.wvlawyerreferral.org/>
- Wisconsin – <http://www.wisbar.org/forpublic/inedalawyer/pages/lris.aspx>
- Wyoming - <https://www.wyomingbar.org/for-the-public/membership-directory/>