



# *Guide To Starting A Business*

Town of Cary • Cary Chamber of Commerce





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# Introduction

The Town of Cary and Cary Chamber of Commerce are interested in the success of your new business and want to partner with you and help you navigate through the process. You may encounter things along the path to opening a business that will be unexpected, so when it comes to working with the Town, we want to help you understand each step before you get started. Whether you plan to operate your business from your home or a storefront, it is important to familiarize yourself with the Town of Cary regulations.

## Home-Based Businesses

Most home-based businesses are permitted in all residential zoning districts within Cary and may not necessarily require any permits. Generally, if you are having customers/clients come to your home or you have an employee working in your home who does not reside there, an [Accessory Use Permit](#) is required for your home occupation. If you have any questions on starting a home occupation, contact Planning & Development Services.

## Storefront Businesses

If you are planning to operate your business from a storefront, we encourage you to review this guide thoroughly ***prior to signing a lease or purchasing property for your new business.***

## Development Liaison Service

Cary offers a Development Liaison service to help you successfully navigate the development and permitting process for your business. The Development Liaison staff primarily focus on business customers and has extensive experience in planning, zoning, permitting, and building code application.

***Cary recommends you apply for a building permit before signing a lease to confirm the land use and building uses are compatible.***

TOWN of CARY





# Zoning & Land Use



## Step 1: Verify Your Zoning & Land Use

Ensure the proposed location of your business is consistent with the [Cary Community Plan](#) and has the appropriate zoning designation for the type of business you plan to open. The [Future Growth Framework Map](#) outlines the community's future vision for growth and development in terms of where residential, office, commercial and industrial uses.

The zoning districts provide appropriately located areas consistent with the [Future Growth Framework Map](#) for a full range of residential, office, commercial and industrial uses. If you are not sure how your business is classified per Cary's zoning [Land Development Ordinance \(LDO\)](#) or the State Building Code, we recommend you contact a Town Development Liaison.

Once it is determined the zoning district allows the use, check the use-specific standards outlined in [Chapter 5](#) of Cary's Land Development Ordinance (LDO) to determine if there are any other specific limitations to consider. Uses in each zoning district are either permitted, not permitted or permitted only with an approved Special Use permit.

Visit Cary's [Property Research Map](#) to confirm existing zoning and land use. Properties can be searched by the parent parcel address, or property identification number (PIN). Contact the Town if you need assistance. If the use isn't permitted by the zoning, you may request to rezone the property or look for another location in Cary that meets your business needs.

***Cary recommends you obtain a building permit before signing a lease to confirm the land use and building uses are compatible.***





# Typical zoning districts consistent with small business uses include:



## Office and Institutional District (OI)

The OI district provides for the development of professional or medical offices and community institutions.



## General Commercial District (GC)

The GC district generally provides for uses that provide goods and services to residents of the community.



## Office/Research and Development District (ORD)

The ORD district provides for a wide range of employment generating office, institutional, research and development, light manufacturing and "flex space" uses.



## Industrial District (I)

The I district provides for light and heavy industrial activities such as manufacturing, warehousing and wholesaling activities with limited contact with the general public, but may generate heavy traffic.



## Town Center District (TC)

The TC district provides for a variety of subdistricts that permit non-residential uses including High Intensity Mixed Use (HMXD), Mixed Use (MXD), Office/Institutional (OFC/INS), Office/Industrial (OFC/IND), Commercial (COM), Commercial Low Intensity (CLI), Cottage Business and Residential (CB&R) and Institutional (INS).



## Planned Development District (PDD)

The PDD district provides for a mixture of uses with innovative design and layout. PDD's may contain a mixture of residential and non-residential uses. Information on Cary's PDD's, including permitted uses, conditions and approved land use plans can be found by visiting our [Property Research map](#).



## Mixed Use District (MXD)

The MXD district is only located within Mixed Use Overlay Districts (MUOD). MXD provides flexibility for a mixture of commercial, office and residential uses subject to specific requirements set forth in a Preliminary Development Plan (PDP) or Site Plan.



# Building Classification



## Step 2: Verify Your Building Classification

Once you determine the zoning is appropriate the next step is to determine if the building meets the safety standards set by the [North Carolina State Building Code](#). It's recommended you work with an architect or contractor in determining whether the space meets these minimum requirements. Building modifications may be needed to meet the minimum building standards.



The building code was established by the State to create minimum building requirements to safeguard the public health, safety and general welfare. The following are a few examples of building elements which are reviewed when a new tenant proposes to occupy a space:

- maximum size and the height of buildings
- required fire-rated separation between tenants
- proper use of building materials
- when sprinkler systems or fire alarms are required
- maximum number of people allowed (occupant load)
- minimum number of exits
- maximum travel distance to the exits
- minimum lighting and ventilation levels
- minimum number of plumbing fixtures, (i.e. toilets, lavatories, drinking fountains)

The minimum building code requirements are applied based on the business activities and the occupancy classification of the tenant as determined (or confirmed) by the building official.

***Cary recommends you obtain a building permit before signing a lease to confirm the land use and building uses are compatible.***



# Occupancy Classification Groups

## Assembly Group A

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) used for the gathering of persons for purposes such as civic, social, religious, recreation or for the consumption of food or drink. Examples include theaters, restaurants, churches, martial arts studios, dance halls or sporting areas.

## Business Group B

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) used for office, professional or service transaction or the storage of record and accounts. Examples include banks, beauty shops, dry cleaners, laboratories and professional offices.

## Educational Group E

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) intended for educational purposes of 6 or more persons up to the 12th grade.

## Factory Group F

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) used for assembling, disassembling, fabricating, finishing, manufacturing, packaging, repairing or processing operations.

## Institutional Group I

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) in which people are cared for or live in a supervised environment, having physical limitations, because of health or age are harbored for medical treatment or other care or treatment. Examples include assisted living facilities, convalescent facilities, group homes and social rehabilitation facilities.

## Mercantile Group M

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) used for the display and sale of merchandise and involves stocks of goods or merchandise accessible to the public. Examples include department stores, drug stores, motor fuel-dispensing facilities and sales rooms.

## Residential Group R

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) used for sleeping purposes but not one or two family dwellings. Examples include boarding houses, hotels, apartments, dorms, live/work units and other residential care facilities.

## Storage Group S

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) used for storage that is not classified as a hazardous occupancy.

## Utility Group U

Building or structures not classified as any specific occupancy. Examples include agricultural buildings, carports, grain silos, private garages, retaining walls, sheds, tanks and towers.





# Building Permits



## Step 3: Applying for a Building Permit

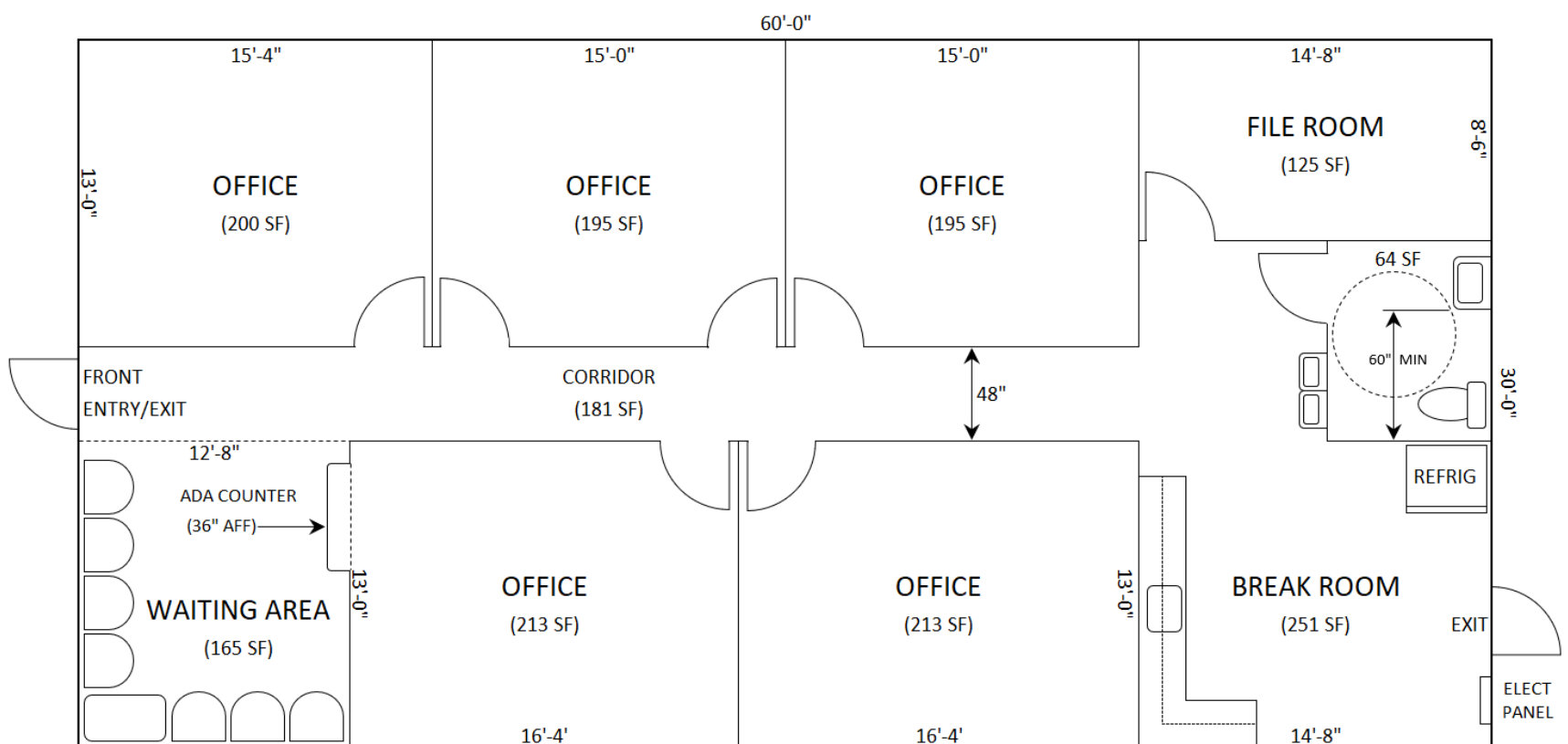
A permit is required anytime a new tenant moves into a space. Additionally, a permit is required if any modifications are made to the building including plumbing, electrical, mechanical, sprinkler, or fire alarm.

When a new tenant moves into a space, these permits are classified as:

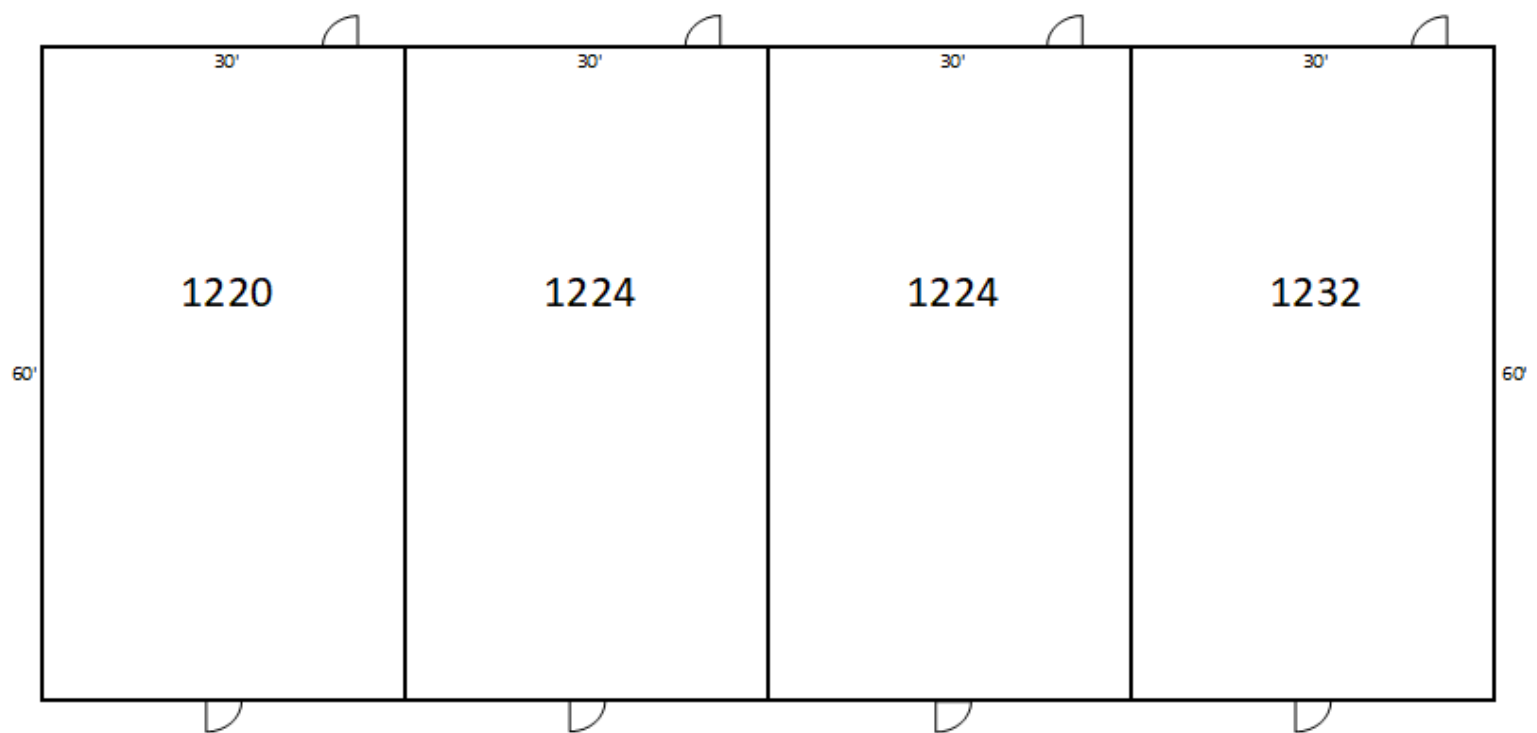
- change of tenant (moving into a space that was previously permitted for the same building occupancy type, such as business to business) or
- change of occupancy (moving into a space that was previously approved for a different building code occupancy type, such as from a business use to an educational use).

You will need to submit a layout of your proposed floor plan and a key plan (see the following samples).

### Sample Floor Plan







### Sample Key Plan

Businesses that are changing occupancy types (example - business to mercantile) will need to complete either a [Building Code Summary](#) or, an [abbreviated Building Code Summary](#). We recommend working with an architect or general contractor for assistance in determining the occupancy classification, space layout, occupancy load, exiting requirements and other requirements based upon the new use (occupancy classification). Some business uses will require additional improvements such as modified ventilation and/or exhaust systems, a fire alarm, or additional plumbing fixtures, and if you are opening a food service business the approval of [fats, oils and grease systems](#) will be necessary. Your architect or general contractor should be familiar with the building code requirements and offer advice on options to meet the codes and provide the costs associated with these improvements. In addition, a change of occupancy to a more intense use may trigger unanticipated costs such as development fees. Contact the Town to determine if your proposed business will require development fees.

***Cary recommends you obtain a building permit before signing a lease to confirm the land use and building uses are compatible.***





Submit your [commercial building permit application](#), online. You will need to upload a floor plan, a key plan and a building code summary (Appendix B). The application and associate documents will be reviewed by multiple disciplines. Following the review, the applicant will receive an email informing them if additional information is needed or if the permit has been approved. If revisions are required, the applicant will need to log in to the electronic plan review portal and respond to the plan review comments and provide the additional information, revised plans, etc. When the permit has been approved the email will provide a list of fees due, instructions on how to make payment and instructions on how to download the approved plans.

Remember that you or your contractor cannot start work on the building improvements until the building permit has been issued. At the appropriate times during the renovation, it will be necessary to schedule inspections for the Town officials to inspect the work to verify compliance with the state building code. Inspections can be scheduled online, in person or by phone. Once the improvements are completed and all the inspections are approved, the Town will mail you a Certificate of Occupancy (CO) or Certificate of Completion (CC) based on the type of the permit.



### **Additional Licensing or Permitting Agencies for Consideration**

You may need approvals from other agencies in addition to your building permit. For example, most food service establishments require a [Food Service Establishment Plan Review Application](#) through Wake County Environmental Services with the exception of bakeries, frozen ice cream and yogurt which require [NC Department of Agriculture](#) approval. If your business serves alcohol (even temporarily), you will need to obtain a permit from the [North Carolina Alcohol & Beverage Control Commission](#) and a [Cary Beer/Wine License](#). If you have questions check with your design professional (architect or engineer), contactor, or a Development Liaison.

### **Making Changes or Additions to the Building Façade or Property's Exterior?**

If there are any improvements to the outside of the building, you may have to submit a development plan. Changes that may require a development plan include:

- change to the exterior color of the building
- building façade changes, including relocation of windows and doors
- relocation or construction of trash enclosures or other structures
- changes in landscaping, sidewalks, parking or other site-related work

Keep in mind that building signs go through a separate permit process (see Step 6). Prior to proposing any changes to the inside or outside of the building, contact the Town to determine what approval may be necessary.



# Signing a Lease



## Step 4: Signing Your Lease

Steps 1-3 outline some of the due diligence that's recommended you complete before you sign a lease. Before entering a contract for a property, it's important to:

- verify the land use and zoning to confirm it will allow your type of business
- follow the North Carolina Licensing Board for General Contractors recommendations prior to signing a contract
- obtain a building permit

## Step 5: Establishing a Utility Account

You will need to establish services for the property unless your utilities will be handled through the landlord or management company. Cary provides water, sewer and in some cases solid waste and recycling. Contact Cary's Finance Department to establish these services.

Other utility services will also need to be established with the appropriate utility providers. Electric service is primarily provided by [Duke Energy](#) and gas service is primarily provided by [Dominion Energy](#).





## Step 6: Getting Your Signs

You'll want to familiarize yourself with Cary's sign regulations. Many forms of advertising, such as wind-blown devices, pennants, sign spinners, etc. are prohibited. Prior to purchasing a sign or other forms of on-site advertising, contact Cary's staff to confirm. Apply for your time-limited and permanent sign [permit applications online](#).

Time-limited signs are permitted for a maximum of 30 days and are issued within the first 60 days of the issuance of the building permit, certificate of occupancy (CO) or certificate of completion (CC). Some businesses choose to use a portion of the 30 days to advertise "Coming Soon" and the remainder of the 30 days for "Now Open", while other businesses may choose to use all 30 days to say "Grand Opening" or "Now Open". The Town of Cary doesn't regulate the content of the sign but regulates the size and duration of time. Time-limited signs are governed by [Chapter 9.3](#) of Cary's Land Development Ordinance (LDO) and require approval of a Time Limited Sign Permit.

Permanent signs are regulated by [Chapter 9.2](#) of Cary's Land Development Ordinance (LDO) and consist of a wide range of signage types, such as wall, ground, awning, directory, suspended, monument, identification, etc. Permanent signs require an approved Sign Permit application and some permanent signs require a building permit. Electric signs with internal wiring or lighting equipment, and/or external lighting equipment that directs light on signs, require an electrical permit. It's recommended you hire a professional sign contractor to help you design, construct and install your permanent sign(s). Questions regarding permanent signs should be directed to a professional sign contractor or the Planning Department.

Many non-residential developments in Cary have Master Sign Plans (formerly known as Uniform Sign Plans), which outline the overall design, number and location for all signs within that development. You can download a copy of the Master Sign Plan at your business location (if applicable) by searching the [Property Research map](#) by address or by project name on the [Master Sign Plan](#) list on the website.



# Ready to Open



## Step 7: Ready to Open

There are many ways to celebrate your opening including a grand opening event. Events such as grand openings may be approved by the Town through the [Temporary Use Permit](#) process. These permits are good for a maximum of 7 calendar days or 3 events per year, whichever is less. The Temporary Use Permit allows you to place temporary structures such as tables, tents, bounce houses, signs, etc. on the property. Apply for your Temporary Use Permit on our [electronic portal](#). You may also receive a complimentary "Ribbon Cutting" per your membership. Please reach out to the Chamber if you are interested. We wish you the very best on your new business.





## Start Your Business

- › **U.S. Small Business Association** [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov)  
Phone: (800) 827-5722  
The primary functions of the SBA include delivering loans, loan guarantees, contracts, counseling sessions and other forms of assistance to small businesses.
- › **Small Business & Technology Development Center** [www.sbtdc.org](http://www.sbtdc.org)  
Phone: (800) 258-0862  
The SBTDC provides management counseling and educational services to small and mid-sized businesses. All services are confidential, and most services are free.
- › **Small Business Center Network of North Carolina** [www.ncsbc.net](http://www.ncsbc.net)  
Phone: (919) 807-7217  
The SBCN is a community-based provider of training, counseling, and resource information. The network is made up of 58 Small Business Centers across the state.

## Site Selection

- › For traditional real estate options you can search for property on the [Cary Economic Development Website](#). Direct any further questions regarding site selection to at the Cary Chamber of Commerce. Phone: (919) 319-4281

## Co-Working Environments

- › [Cofounders Capital Lab](#)
- › [Cary Innovation Center](#)
- › [Vibe CoWorking](#)
- › [Office Evolution](#)





# Financial Incentive Programs

## *Town of Cary*

Financial Grant	Description	Requirements
Façade Improvement Program	Approved property owners or tenants who improve the exteriors of existing businesses may seek reimbursement for half the cost, depending on the amount.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must undertake at least \$2,000 of improvements</li> <li>• Project site must be located within the Town Center Area Plan boundary</li> <li>• Tenants must have a minimum of two years remaining on their lease or have option to renew</li> <li>• Improvements must be on the façade of the building facing the primary street orientation</li> </ul>
Individual Incentives	The Town of Cary does not have a set policy regarding economic incentives. Each case is evaluated by the Town Council on its individual merits and incentives may be awarded if approved by Council. Items considered are, number of jobs, quality of jobs, capital investment, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide number of jobs, salary of jobs, and amount of capital investment that the project will generate</li> <li>• There are no minimum requirements for the above items, and each project is evaluated on a case-by-case basis.</li> </ul>



## *Wake County*

Financial Grant	Description	Requirements
Business Investment Grant	The county will award a grant worth up to 2.25% of the new investment that will be paid over a period of up to eight years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must meet either <a href="#">New Investment Threshold</a> and/or <a href="#">New Jobs Threshold</a></li> </ul>

# State of North Carolina

Financial Grant	Description	Requirements
<a href="#">Job Development Investment Grant</a>	A discretionary incentive that provides sustained annual grants to new and expanding businesses measured against a percentage of withholding taxes paid by new employees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project results in a net increase in employment</li> <li>• Project increases opportunities for employment and strengthens the state's economy</li> <li>• Project is consistent with the economic development goals of the state and of the area in which it is located</li> <li>• Project is competitive with another state(s) or country</li> <li>• Grant is necessary for the completion of the project in North Carolina</li> </ul>
<a href="#">One North Carolina</a>	Helps recruit and expand quality jobs in high value-added, knowledge-driven industries. It also provides financial assistance to those businesses or industries deemed vital to a healthy economy that are making significant efforts to expand in North Carolina.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The company must agree to meet an average wage test.</li> <li>• Local units of government (city or county) must agree to match financial assistance to the company.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Small Business Technology Transfer</a>	A program that expands funding opportunities in the federal innovation research and development arena. Central to the program is expansion of the public/private sector partnership to include the joint venture opportunities for small businesses and nonprofit research institutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organized for profit, with a place of business located in the United States;</li> <li>• At least 51 percent owned and controlled by one or more individuals who are citizens of, or permanent residents of the United States, and;</li> <li>• No more than 500 employees, including affiliates.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Tax Credits in North Carolina</a>	North Carolina is consistently ranked among the best business climates in the nation by Forbes, CNBC, Chief Executive and Site Selection. Several tax credit programs contribute to this business environment that makes North Carolina a place where companies Thrive.	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interactive Digital Media</li> <li>• Renewable Energy</li> <li>• Technology Development</li> </ul>





# Entrepreneurial Organizations

## Cary Innovation Center

The Cary Innovation Center is the community for innovation and entrepreneurship in Cary. They seek to innovate, educate and develop successful entrepreneurs. If interested, become a participant in their I.D.E.A.L. entrepreneurial courses aimed at increasing knowledge for all levels of entrepreneurs.

### **Address**

201 W. Chatham Street  
Cary, NC 27511

### **Contact**

Ian Henshaw  
(919) 633-0055  
[ian@caryinnovationcenter.com](mailto:ian@caryinnovationcenter.com)

## Cary CoFounders Lab

CoFounders Capital, who operates Cary CoFounders Lab, tends to invest in software companies providing solutions to pressing problems with measurable value. Before investing, they spend a lot of time helping founders build their venture. The lab provides office space and resources to enable entrepreneurs to grow their ideas.

### **Address**

122 E. Chatham Street  
Suite 301  
Cary, NC 27511

### **Contact**

David Gardner  
[david@cofounderscapital.com](mailto:david@cofounderscapital.com)

## Vibe CoWorking

Vibe CoWorking is a local facility that offers Coworking Membership, Private Office Membership and Event / Meeting Room Rental. If interested, join and see what benefits a Coworking Environment can offer you.

### **Address**

1105 Walnut Street  
Suite F-160  
Cary, NC 27511

### **Contact**

Leah Campbell  
[leah@vibecary.com](mailto:leah@vibecary.com)



# Business Organizations

Organization	Description	Contact
<a href="#">Cary Chamber of Commerce</a>	Serves as the unified business voice of the Cary area. It provides leadership to support and facilitate a thriving business environment. The Chamber believes that such an environment is characterized by the strength and growth of resident businesses, by the quality and stability of their workforces and by the attractiveness of our market to businesses whose presence would be a positive influence on our community.	<b>Mailing Address</b> 307 North Academy St Cary, NC 27513  <b>Phone</b> (919) 467-1016  <b>Email</b> <a href="mailto:info@carychamber.com">info@carychamber.com</a>
<a href="#">Association for Corporate Growth</a>	A global organization with 14,000 members comprising 55 chapters in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Asia. By bringing together business leaders and middle market deal-makers, the organization assists in growth and business-building by ensuring member access to data, content, and networking opportunities.	<b>Mailing Address</b> 1404 Sky Hill Place Wake Forest, NC 27587  <b>Phone</b> (919) 453-2997
<a href="#">MCNC</a>	A nonprofit organization committed to building partnerships among academic, research, government, and business communities for more than a quarter of a century. These partnerships enable and advance education, innovation, and economic development throughout North Carolina by delivering the world's foremost information technology services through the North Carolina Research and Education Network.	<b>Mailing Address</b> 3021 E. Cornwallis Road PO Box 12889 Research Triangle Park, NC 27709  <b>Phone</b> (919) 248-1900
<a href="#">National Association of Women Business Owners</a>	Provides support to women entrepreneurs in social, economic, and political arenas. NAW-BO focuses on promoting economic development, creating innovation and effective change, building strategic alliances, and influencing public policy.	Susan Stanhope President  <b>Mailing Address</b> 1204 Village Market Place, Box 193 Morrisville, NC 27560  <b>Phone</b> (919) 218-4783
<a href="#">Research Triangle Institute</a>	A not for profit corporation established by leaders in academia, business, and state government, which provides contact research to federal, state, and local government agencies, as well as to private industry and foundations. Capabilities span the physical, life, and social sciences including survey research, behavioral studies, chemistry, energy, and environmental research, population, education, health systems, economics, statistics, state planning, engineering, technology applications, virtual reality applications, toxicology, and toxic wastes.	<b>Phone</b> (919) 541-6000  <b>Email</b> <a href="mailto:Listen@rti.org">Listen@rti.org</a>



# Training & Education

## Capital Area Workforce Development Board

[www.capitalareawdb.com](http://www.capitalareawdb.com)

- › Capital Area Workforce Development is a public-private partnership that focuses on economic development by ensuring the local workforce has the skills, training and education to meet the needs of local employers. [Read More](#)
- › **Contact**  
Kimberly Wheeler  
Business Engagement Director  
Capital Area Workforce Development Board

## Wake Technical Community College

[www.waketech.edu](http://www.waketech.edu)

- › **Workforce Development - Customized Training Program**  
The Customized Training Program provides training assistance that supports full time production and direct customer service positions created in North Carolina. The growth potential of NC companies is enhanced while simultaneously preparing NC's workforce with the skills essential for successful employment in emerging industries. [Read More](#)
- › **Course Listings**  
Wake Tech offers a broad selection of courses and degrees that will prepare students for whatever field they choose to pursue. Students at Wake Tech receive an education that is high-quality and very affordable. [See Them Here](#)
- › **Small Business Center** [www.waketech.edu/programs-courses/non-credit/build-your-business/small-business-center](http://www.waketech.edu/programs-courses/non-credit/build-your-business/small-business-center)  
The Wake Tech Small Business Center (SBC) is a state-funded organization which is part of the Small Business Center Network of North Carolina (SBCN). The SBC provides a multitude of free resources for small business owners, whether they are starting or expanding their business.





- › **Continuing Education** [www.waketech.edu/programs-courses/non-credit](http://www.waketech.edu/programs-courses/non-credit)  
Wake Tech provides a wide range of workforce training and lifelong learning classes for professional and personal enrichment, offered at a variety of campuses and community sites throughout Wake County.
- › **Entrepreneurship Initiatives** [www.waketech.edu/programs-courses/non-credit/build-your-business/center-entrepreneurship](http://www.waketech.edu/programs-courses/non-credit/build-your-business/center-entrepreneurship)  
Wake Tech's Entrepreneurship Initiatives department places a dual emphasis on information and activities on campus and in the community.
- › **Contact**  
Western Wake Campus  
3434 Kildaire Farm Road  
Cary, North Carolina 27518  
(919) 335-1000





## Town of Cary

Planning & Development Services  
316 N Academy Street  
Cary, NC 27513  
Phone 311 in Cary or (919) 469-4000

- › Jeph Allen  
Development Liaison Supervisor  
(919) 469-4336  
[jeph.allen@townofcary.org](mailto:jeph.allen@townofcary.org)
- › Tara Adams  
Development Liaison Associate  
(919) 319-4583  
[tara.adams@townofcary.org](mailto:tara.adams@townofcary.org)
- › Kenneth Caudle  
Business Liaison  
(919) 621-3243  
[kenneth.caudle@townofcary.org](mailto:kenneth.caudle@townofcary.org)

## Cary Chamber of Commerce

307 N Academy Street  
Cary, NC 27513

- › Mark Lawson  
Vice President of Economic Development  
(919) 319-4281  
[mlawson@carychamber.com](mailto:mlawson@carychamber.com)

