
Bookkeeping Client Onboarding Checklist

A 12-step framework for onboarding new bookkeeping clients — from discovery call to clean monthly close.

The 12-Step Onboarding Process

Use this as a sequential checklist for every new client. Each step has a clear deliverable, and each one feeds into the next. Check the box when the step is complete.

- 01 Discovery Call**
30–45 minute call. Confirm entity type, fiscal year, current bookkeeping software, payroll setup, sales tax obligations, and any open IRS or state tax issues.

- 02 Engagement Letter**
Send within 24 hours of the discovery call. Specify scope, fee structure, payment terms, and required documents.

- 03 New Client Intake Form**
Single intake form capturing legal entity name, EIN, business address, primary contact, fiscal year end, current accounting software, and prior accountant contact info.

- 04 Document Collection Request**
Send the document request once the intake form is back. Use a single upload link rather than email back-and-forth.

- 05 Software Access and Permissions**
Get accountant or admin access to the client's current accounting software (QuickBooks Online, Xero, Wave, etc.). Verify the chart of accounts.

- 06 Historical Bookkeeping Catch-Up**
Set a clear cutoff (start of current fiscal year or last reconciled month) and bring books current from there.

- 07 Bank and Credit Card Reconciliation**
Reconcile every bank account and credit card from the catch-up cutoff forward. Surface and resolve discrepancies.

- 08 Chart of Accounts Review**
Walk through the chart of accounts. Adjust the structure to match the actual reporting needs of the business.

- 09 Recurring Transactions Setup**
Set up rules and recurring transactions for predictable items: rent, software subscriptions, payroll, recurring vendors.

- 10 Reporting Cadence**
Agree on monthly reporting (P&L, balance sheet, cash flow, AR/AP aging), delivery date, and format.

- 11 Communication Norms**
Define how the client sends new documents going forward. One link, one place, every time.

- 12 30-Day Check-In**
Schedule the check-in. Confirm catch-up is complete, first clean monthly close has happened, and reports are landing.

Documents to Collect

The standard document list to request from a new bookkeeping client. Adapt for the client's specific situation.

Entity & Tax Documents

- Articles of Incorporation or LLC formation documents
- EIN letter from the IRS (Form CP 575)
- S corp election letter (Form 2553), if applicable
- Prior year's federal and state tax returns
- Open IRS or state notices

Banking & Financial Statements

- 12 months of bank statements (every business account)
- 12 months of credit card statements
- Year-end loan statements
- Merchant processor statements

Bookkeeping Records

- Prior year's profit and loss statement
- Prior year's balance sheet
- Working chart of accounts
- Backup file or accountant access to existing accounting software

Payroll Documents (if applicable)

- Payroll provider login or recent payroll reports
- W-2s and 1099s issued in the prior year
- Most recent quarterly Form 941
- Current employee and contractor list

Operational Records

- Active business insurance policy
- Current vendor list with W-9s on file
- Customer list with active contracts
- Signed leases for office or equipment