

THE OWNER'S WEALTH SERIES • COMPANION TO BOOK 2

The Owner's Plan Stack Worksheet and Scorecard

Free printable companion to *Outside the Business: The Business Owner's Guide to Retirement Plans*

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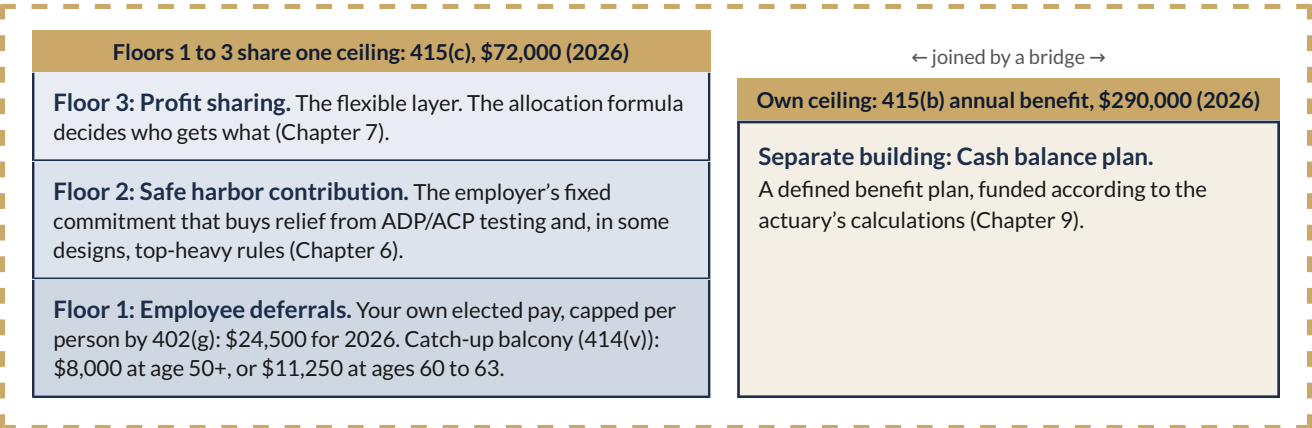
How to use this worksheet. Print it and fill it in with a pencil. Page 2 is the plan stack: check the layers you have today. Pages 3 and 4 are the Plan Design Worksheet from Appendix B; fill them in before your next meeting with your TPA, actuary, or CPA. Page 5 is the census checklist to send to your payroll provider. Page 6 is a one-page "which plan fits" decision path. Page 7 is the 12-question Owner's Plan Scorecard from Chapter 15: each "no" is an item for your list. Then come the questions to bring to your advisors and the 2026 limits at a glance. Everything here is taken from *Outside the Business*, where each item is explained and sourced. It does not calculate contributions or recommend a plan.

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Your Plan Stack

From Chapter 2, “The Plan Stack: A Picture in Words.” Dollar limits are for tax year 2026 (IRS Notice 2025-67). Limits adjust annually; check [irs.gov](https://www.irs.gov) for the current year.

THE FENCE: YOUR CONTROLLED GROUP OR AFFILIATED SERVICE GROUP



The fence is the employer as the law defines it: every business in your controlled group or affiliated service group. Everything inside is tested together. **The walls** on every floor keep the design fair: coverage (410(b)), nondiscrimination (401(a)(4)), and top-heavy minimums (416). Most owners start on the ground floor.

My plan stack today

Check each layer you have now. Note the formula or provider, and what you want to ask about it.

Layer	Formula or provider	Question to ask
☐ Employee deferrals (ground floor) 402(g): \$24,500 per person; catch-up \$8,000 (50+), \$11,250 (ages 60 to 63)		
☐ Safe harbor contribution (second floor) Employer’s fixed commitment; buys relief from ADP/ACP testing		
☐ Profit sharing (third floor) Flexible; the allocation formula decides who gets what		
☐ Cash balance plan (separate building) 415(b): \$290,000 maximum annual benefit; funded per the actuary		

Businesses inside my fence (mine, my spouse’s, my children’s): _____

Controlled-group analysis in writing? ☐ Yes ☐ No Date: _____

Plan Design Worksheet

From Appendix B. Use this worksheet to prepare for a meeting with your TPA, actuary, CPA, and advisor. It does not calculate contributions. It collects the facts that professionals need to give you an accurate answer.

Part 1: The Business and Its Owners

Question	Your answer
Legal entity type (sole proprietorship, single-member LLC, partnership/multi-member LLC, S corporation, C corporation)	
Tax year end	
Owners and ownership percentages (including spouse and children)	
Other businesses owned by you, your spouse, or your children, with percentages	
Do any of your businesses perform services for one another?	
Has a controlled-group / affiliated-service-group analysis been done in writing? Date:	
Owner ages	
Owner compensation (W-2 wages, or net earnings from self-employment) for the last three years	
Profit stability: have profits been steady for three or more years?	
Expected years to a sale, transition, or step-back	

Plan Design Worksheet, continued

Part 2: The Current Plan (If Any)

Question	Your answer
Plan type(s): SEP, SIMPLE IRA, solo 401(k), 401(k), safe harbor 401(k), profit sharing, cash balance	
Safe harbor formula, if any	
Profit-sharing allocation formula	
Eligibility requirements (age, service, entry dates)	
Vesting schedule	
Roth deferrals allowed? Roth employer contributions?	
Loans allowed? After-tax contributions? In-plan Roth conversions?	
Recordkeeper, TPA, actuary, investment fiduciary (3(21) or 3(38))	
Failed tests or refunds in the last three years?	
Last design review date	
Last fee benchmarking date	
Total plan assets; owner's balance	

Part 3: Goals

Question	Your answer
How much would you like to set aside each year, as a range?	
How much annual employer cost for staff is acceptable, as a range or percentage of payroll?	
How much flexibility do you need from year to year?	
Preference for pre-tax, Roth, or a mix?	
How important is simplicity versus capacity?	

Census Checklist

From Appendix B, Part 4. Ask your payroll provider for a spreadsheet with one row per employee (including employees of related businesses) and these columns:

- ☐ Name or employee ID
- ☐ Date of birth
- ☐ Date of hire (and rehire, if any)
- ☐ Date of termination, if any
- ☐ Hours worked during the year
- ☐ Gross compensation for the year (and the plan's definition of compensation, if different)
- ☐ Employee deferrals for the year (pre-tax and Roth)
- ☐ Ownership percentage, including family attribution
- ☐ Officer status
- ☐ Entity (if you have more than one business)
- ☐ Union status, if applicable

Plan year: _____ Requested from payroll on: _____ Received on: _____

Sent to TPA on: _____ Sent to actuary on (if any): _____

Who holds which keys

From Chapter 2. For each task, write down who does it and what the contract says. The duties you cannot delegate, especially selecting and monitoring these providers, stay with you (Chapter 14).

Role	Firm and contact	What the contract says they do
Recordkeeper		
TPA (third-party administrator)		
Actuary (cash balance plans)		
Investment fiduciary: 3(21) or 3(38)		
CPA		
ERISA attorney		

Which Plan Fits? A Decision Path

From Appendix B, Part 5. This is a simplified, educational guide. Your facts may lead to a different answer. The 415(c) figure is the limit for tax year 2026 (IRS Notice 2025-67); limits adjust annually.

1	Do you have employees (other than a spouse) who are, or will soon be, eligible for a plan? No → Compare a solo 401(k) and a SEP-IRA (Chapters 3 and 4). Then go to question 5. Yes → Go to question 2.
↓	
2	Do you want to defer more than the SIMPLE IRA limits, or add profit sharing or a cash balance plan? No → A SIMPLE IRA may be enough (Chapter 3). Yes → Go to question 3.
↓	
3	Would your plan fail the ADP/ACP test without a safe harbor? Yes, or unsure → Consider a safe harbor 401(k) (Chapter 6). Go to question 4. No → A traditional 401(k) may work; keep monitoring testing. Go to question 4.
↓	
4	Do you reach the \$72,000 (2026) 415(c) limit, with stable profits and at least several years before a sale? No → Consider profit sharing with a well-designed formula (Chapter 7). Yes → Ask an actuary to study a cash balance plan in a combined design (Chapters 9 and 10).
↓	
5	Do you own, or does your spouse own, more than one business? Yes → Get the controlled-group analysis in writing before adopting anything (Chapters 2 and 5).

This worksheet is educational only and is not a recommendation. Plan capacity and costs depend on your facts and must be determined by qualified professionals.

The Owner's Plan Scorecard

From Chapter 15. Answer each question yes or no. Each "no" is an item for your list.

1	I know what share of my net worth is inside the company and outside it.	☐ Yes	☐ No
2	I know my plan's annual contribution capacity, based on my plan document, my compensation, and the current IRS limits.	☐ Yes	☐ No
3	I have used most of that capacity in each of the last three years.	☐ Yes	☐ No
4	My controlled-group status has been reviewed and documented in writing.	☐ Yes	☐ No
5	My plan design has been reviewed on my current census within the last two years.	☐ Yes	☐ No
6	I know the share of total plan contributions that goes to owners versus staff.	☐ Yes	☐ No
7	My plan's fees have been benchmarked within the last three to five years, and the review is documented.	☐ Yes	☐ No
8	My plan has a written investment policy statement that is followed.	☐ Yes	☐ No
9	Deferrals are deposited within a few business days of each payroll.	☐ Yes	☐ No
10	My plan documents, testing, Forms 5500, and bond are organized in one place and ready for a buyer.	☐ Yes	☐ No
11	If I have a cash balance plan, I know its funded status and have a termination plan.	☐ Yes	☐ No
12	My beneficiary designations are current on every retirement account.	☐ Yes	☐ No

Total "yes" answers: ____ / 12

Date taken: _____

Interpreting your score. This scorecard is educational. It does not measure plan quality or predict results, and it is not a recommendation. Ten or more "yes" answers suggest your plan structure is in good order. Six to nine suggests a few areas worth working on this year. Five or fewer suggests that a focused review with your advisors could be valuable.

Where I am on the roadmap (Chapter 15)

☐ 10 or More Years Out:
Build the Chassis

☐ 5 to 10 Years Out:
Optimize the Design

☐ 2 to 5 Years Out: Clean
Up for Due Diligence

☐ 0 to 2 Years Out:
Execute

My list: the "no" answers I will work on first

Questions to Bring to Your Advisors

From Chapter 15. Ask for answers in writing where you can. Asking them does not create an advisory relationship.

For your TPA:

1. Is my plan design still right for my current census and goals?
2. What share of total employer contributions goes to owners versus staff, under each formula?
3. Has the plan passed all required tests every year, and were any corrections made?
4. What is my controlled-group status, and is it documented?

For your actuary (if you have or are considering a cash balance plan):

1. What are the minimum and maximum contributions this year and, in a projection, in a downside year?
2. What is the plan's funded status on a termination basis today?
3. How should the investment approach and pay credits change as an exit approaches?

For your CPA:

1. Is my compensation set with reasonable-compensation rules and plan capacity in mind?
2. Are my contributions deductible within the 404 limits, including the combined limit?
3. What does a multi-year tax map look like for the years around a sale?

For your financial advisor:

1. How much of my net worth is outside the business, and how is it invested?
2. How do my plan balances fit my "target number" (Chapter 1)?
3. What are my rollover, Roth conversion, and distribution options after a sale, and how are you compensated for each?

Want to talk it through? Book a conversation at <https://oncehub.com/jamesustby>. Scheduling a conversation does not create an advisory relationship, and there is no obligation. More at jamesustby.com.

Limits at a Glance: Tax Year 2026

From Appendix A. Figures are for **tax year 2026**, from IRS Notice 2025-67 and IR-2025-111 unless otherwise noted. Limits change every year; before acting, confirm the current year's figures on the IRS page "COLA increases for dollar limitations on benefits and contributions" (irs.gov).

401(k), 403(b), and Governmental 457 Plans

Limit	Code section	2026
Elective deferrals (per person, across all plans)	402(g)(1)	\$24,500
Catch-up contributions, age 50 and over	414(v)(2)(B)(i)	\$8,000
Higher catch-up, ages 60 to 63 during the year	414(v)(2)(E)(i)	\$11,250
Roth catch-up wage threshold (2025 FICA wages that trigger Roth-only catch-ups in 2026)	414(v)(7)(A)	\$150,000
Annual additions to a defined contribution plan (excluding catch-ups)	415(c)(1)(A)	\$72,000
Compensation a plan can take into account	401(a)(17)	\$360,000

Defined Benefit and Cash Balance Plans

Limit	Code section	2026
Maximum annual benefit	415(b)(1)(A)	\$290,000

Testing and Definitions

Limit	Code section	2026
Highly compensated employee threshold (applied to 2026 compensation to determine HCEs for 2027)	414(q)(1)(B)	\$160,000
Key employee: officer compensation threshold	416(i)(1)(A)(i)	\$235,000
Key employee: more-than-1% owner compensation threshold (statutory; not indexed)	416(i)(1)(A)(iii)	\$150,000

SEP and SIMPLE IRA Plans

Limit	Code section	2026
SEP: maximum contribution	415(c), 404(h)	Lesser of 25% of compensation or \$72,000
SEP: compensation limit	408(k)(3)(C)	\$360,000
SEP: minimum compensation for coverage	408(k)(2)(C)	\$800
SIMPLE: elective deferrals (general)	408(p)(2)(E)(i)(III)	\$17,000
SIMPLE: elective deferrals (certain employers)	408(p)(2)(E)(i)(I), (II)	\$18,100
SIMPLE: catch-up, age 50 and over (general)	414(v)(2)(B)(ii)	\$4,000
SIMPLE: catch-up, age 50 and over (certain plans)	414(v)(2)(B)(iii)	\$3,850
SIMPLE: catch-up, ages 60 to 63	414(v)(2)(E)(ii)	\$5,250

Credits

Item	Source	2026
Startup cost credit: per-year cap	IRC §45E; IRS startup credit page	Greater of \$500 or the lesser of \$250 × eligible NHCEs or \$5,000 (not indexed)
Employer contribution credit: per-employee cap	IRC §45E(f)	\$1,000 (not indexed)
Employer contribution credit: employee compensation threshold	IRC §45E(f)(2)(C)	\$110,000
Auto-enrollment credit	IRC §45T	\$500 per year for three years (not indexed)

Sources: IRS Notice 2025-67; IR-2025-111; IRS "Retirement plans startup costs tax credit"; statutes as cited. Figures are believed accurate as of October 2026 but are not guaranteed. Full citations are in Appendix A and the chapter Notes of Outside the Business.

Rather talk it through?

Book an introductory conversation at <https://oncehub.com/jamesustby>. Bring this worksheet, or just your questions: where your plan stands, what to work on first, and how your plans fit with a future sale. More at jamesustby.com.

An introductory conversation is for educational purposes, does not establish an advisory relationship, and carries no obligation.

Important Disclosures

Important: This worksheet is for general educational and informational purposes only and is not individualized investment, tax, legal, or accounting advice. Filling it in does not create an advisory, fiduciary, or client relationship. It does not calculate contributions, recommend a plan, investment, or product, or predict any result. Plan capacity, costs, and testing results depend on your facts and must be determined by qualified professionals, such as your TPA, actuary, CPA, and ERISA attorney. Everything in it is taken from *Outside the Business*, where each item is explained and sourced.

Any examples referred to in this worksheet or in the book are hypothetical and for illustration only. They do not represent actual clients, and they are not predictions or guarantees of future results.

Dollar limits shown are federal retirement plan limits for **tax year 2026** (IRS Notice 2025-67 and IRS News Release IR-2025-111), believed accurate as of October 2026 but not guaranteed. Most limits adjust each year; verify current figures at irs.gov before acting.

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