

EIN: Free vs Paid Decision Package

Fillable Comparison Matrix & Decision Worksheet — ClearLegalTips.com (2026)

An EIN costs \$0, always. The IRS issues it free in about ten minutes online, and every website charging \$50 to \$300 is reselling that same free application. This package helps you (1) compare every free and paid route side by side, (2) decide honestly whether paying is justified in your case, and (3) prep your details so you can finish the free application in one sitting.

Part 1 — Free IRS Application vs. Paid Services: The Real Numbers

Reproduce this from the article. The last row is the whole consumer lesson: standalone EIN sites charge a markup to type your answers into the free IRS tool, sometimes slower than doing it yourself. The IRS's actual application lives only on irs.gov, and the IRS never charges for an EIN.

Method	Cost	Time to EIN	What you actually get
IRS online (direct)	\$0	Immediate	EIN + confirmation letter, on-screen
IRS fax (Form SS-4)	\$0	~4 business days	EIN by return fax
IRS mail (Form SS-4)	\$0	4–6 weeks	EIN by mail
IRS phone (international)	\$0	During the call	EIN for founders with no SSN/ITIN
Formation services (ZenBusiness, Bizee, LegalZoom)	~\$0–\$100 as an add-on (prices change; check current)	1–2 business days	EIN bundled into LLC formation
Standalone "EIN filing" websites	\$50–\$300	1–7 days	The same free application, resold

The Four Free Ways to Get One (IRS Direct)

Online (the right answer for most)

\$0, about ten minutes, EIN issued on-screen the moment you finish. Runs weekdays during extended Eastern business hours, requires the responsible party to have an SSN or ITIN, must be completed in one sitting, and enforces the bottleneck: one EIN per responsible party per day. Print and save the confirmation letter before you close the tab.

Fax (Form SS-4)

\$0, about four business days — the standard route when the online tool says no. The form and fax numbers live on the IRS About Form SS-4 page.

Mail (Form SS-4)

\$0 and four to six weeks — the patience option.

Phone (international applicants)

\$0 via the IRS's dedicated line for founders without an SSN or ITIN, with a completed SS-4 in hand when you call.

Part 2 — Decision Worksheet: Should You Pay?

Paying is only rational in three cases. Work through each below. If you land in one of them, paying can be justified; if none apply, go free at irs.gov.

Case A — Bundled LLC formation

A service is already forming your LLC, and letting it grab the EIN in the same flow costs little and saves a login. This is convenience pricing, not deception.

Is a service already forming my entity (yes / no): _____

Add-on EIN price quoted by that service (\$): _____

Is the EIN offered free or near-free inside the bundle (yes / no): _____

Case B — No SSN or ITIN (international founder)

International founders can't use the online tool. A service that manages the SS-4 fax-and-follow-up (doola built its business on exactly this) is buying real hassle-reduction, not a number.

Does the responsible party have an SSN or ITIN (yes / no): _____

If no, does the service handle the SS-4 fax + follow-up (yes / no): _____

Fee quoted for the no-SSN service (\$): _____

Case C — Genuine entity confusion

If you don't yet know whether you're forming an LLC, electing S-corp status, or who the 'responsible party' should be, the fee is really buying guidance. Compare it against free tools (LLC formation cost calculator, S-corp vs. LLC calculator) first.

Do I already know my entity type (yes / no): _____

Do I know who the responsible party is (yes / no): _____

Is the fee buying real guidance, not just form entry (yes / no): _____

The math check (for everyone else)

Outside those three cases the math is unforgiving: paying \$79 to skip a ten-minute form values your time at roughly \$475 an hour. If that's genuinely your rate, you already have an assistant who can do this for you.

Fee I'm being asked to pay (\$): _____

My honest hourly rate (\$/hr): _____

Effective hourly cost = fee ÷ (10 min ÷ 60) — is it worth it (yes / no): _____

OUTCOME (circle one)

☐ GO FREE — none of Cases A/B/C clearly apply; I will apply at irs.gov myself.

☐ PAY IS JUSTIFIED — Case A / B / C applies (note which):

Part 3 — Before You Apply: Prep Worksheet (Companion)

A secondary 'before you apply' companion. Ten minutes of prep prevents the classic reference-number errors. The online session cannot be saved mid-way, so gather everything first. Get the entity first, then the EIN — the IRS wants your LLC's exact legal name as the state approved it.

Business Identity

Exact legal entity name (as the state approved it): _____

Trade name / DBA (if any): _____

Business start date: _____

Closing month of the fiscal year (December for almost everyone): _____

Responsible Party

The responsible party is the human who controls the entity (sole member for most single-member LLCs; a managing member or officer otherwise) — not another company.

Responsible party full name: _____

SSN or ITIN of responsible party: _____

Business address: _____

State of formation: _____

Entity & Activity

Entity type (LLC / corporation / sole prop / etc.): _____

Number of members / owners: _____

Principal business activity: _____

Expected employee count for the next 12 months: _____

Reason for applying: _____

After the Number Arrives

- Save the CP 575 confirmation letter as PDF and paper — the IRS does not reissue it (only a substitute verification letter, after a phone call).
- Open the business bank account (bring the EIN letter, formation documents, and often the operating agreement).
- Put the EIN — never your SSN — on W-9s, invoices, and vendor forms.
- Register the state tax accounts that apply (sales tax, employer withholding) — these are separate from the federal EIN.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

How to use this package: Start with Part 1 to see every free and paid route. Use Part 2 to decide honestly whether paying is justified in your situation — if none of the three cases apply, go free at irs.gov. Fill Part 3 before you open the IRS EIN Assistant so you can finish in one sitting (the online tool can't be saved mid-way, and it's one EIN per responsible party per day). This resource is informational only, not legal advice.

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