
ASSESS • PATTERN • RESTORE

UPHOLSTERY BUSINESS GUIDE

Build skill before inventory.

Price the full restoration.

Create a distinctive specialty.

CRAFT | MATERIALS | SCOPE | MARGIN

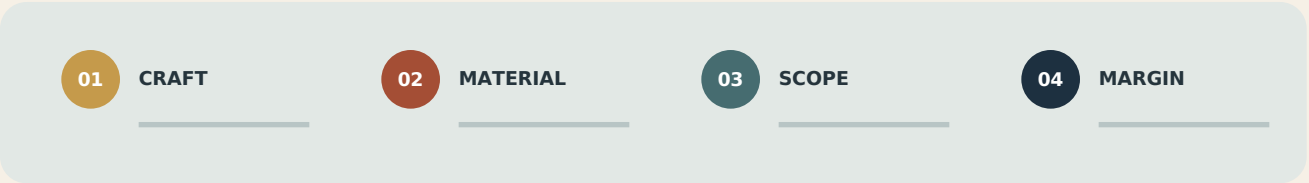
Veteran's Strategic Solutions LLC



START HERE

How to Use This Guide

Read the core guide first. Then use the worksheets to test the market, define a specialty, budget skill development and workshop equipment, build a detailed estimate, document item condition and authorized work, invoice completed projects, track leads and turnaround, and control tool, dust, chemical, fire, lifting, material, customer-property, and disposal risks.

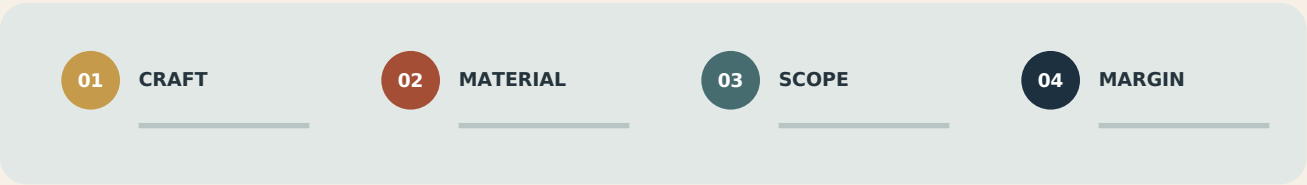


PATTERN DISCIPLINE | Measure, mark, cut, and retain reference pieces before material is committed.

PIECE	USE
Core guide	Validate demand and shop turnaround, build the actual craft skill, and test a focused specialty before opening a general shop.
Operating kit	Use the startup, budget, estimate, project authorization, invoice, tracker, and safety pages for each item.

CORE GUIDE 01

The Bet



Core assumption that must be true: The intended service area has room for another upholstery provider or a specialty that current shops do not emphasize. Where established shops already serve the general market, a new operator may need a narrower position.

Fastest zero-budget way to test it: Call active upholstery shops serving the intended area and ask about current turnaround time on a standard job. A long wait — weeks to months — suggests real unmet demand. A short wait suggests the market may already be well covered.

Three biggest reasons this fails before you spend a dollar: 1. Established competitors may already serve a narrow pool of work, leaving a new general shop to fight for existing demand rather than open a new market. 2. This is a genuine skill business, not an equipment business. Upholstery’s real barrier is sewing and pattern-work skill. The flyer’s own first step is “take classes or apprentice” — that is not a formality, it is the actual constraint. 3. The commercial and hospitality angle the flyer highlights — hotels, restaurants, and offices — requires relationships and contracts that take time to build, and the intended market may not support the assumed volume.

BUSINESS LENS	CONTROL
Craft	Accept only work that matches current sewing, pattern, structure, and finish capability.
Scope	Document the item, condition, materials, hidden-risk assumptions, and approved restoration.
Margin	Price labor, material yield, freight, rework, and pickup or delivery before accepting the job.

CORE GUIDE 02

Who Pays, In Their Own Words

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“My grandmother’s chair has been in the family for decades and I want it re-covered, not replaced.” “The booth seats at our restaurant are torn and it looks bad for customers.” “I need my boat seats redone before the season starts.”

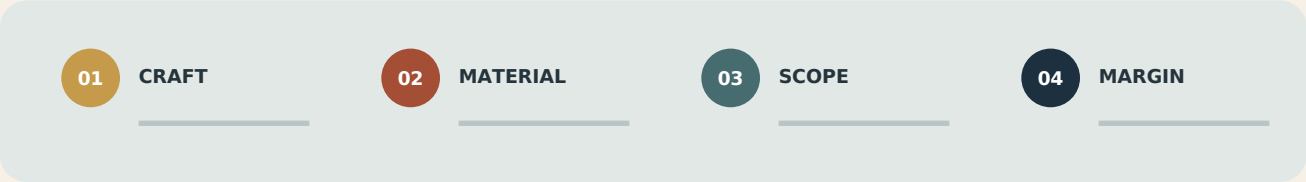
That is a repair-and-restore buyer, not a new-furniture buyer — someone choosing to fix something with sentimental or practical value rather than replace it. That buyer exists regardless of how many shops are in the area; the question is whether enough of that demand remains available to support another shop.



MATERIAL DECISION | Match use, wear, care, color, texture, availability, and budget before ordering.

CORE GUIDE 03

The Smallest Version You Can Charge For



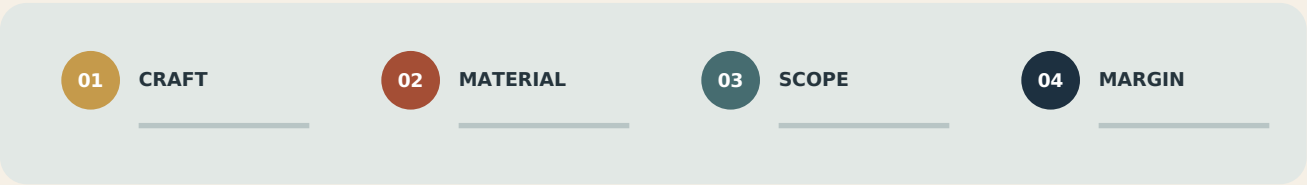
Skip the general shop entirely and start with a narrow specialty that existing shops may not emphasize — automotive or marine upholstery, for example, which draws a different customer than furniture reupholstery and requires different but learnable skills. Confirm that the chosen specialty has a real customer base before committing.

Path to your first paying customer: one small job — a single chair or a set of vehicle seats — priced to build the portfolio and get before-and-after photos.

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CORE GUIDE 04

What It Actually Takes



Check licensing, zoning, and tax rules for your own city and state before starting. The skill itself is the barrier, not regulation.

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Craft	Accept only work that matches current sewing, pattern, structure, and finish capability.
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CORE GUIDE 05

First 90 Days and the One Metric

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Days 1-14: Call active upholstery shops serving the intended area. Confirm real wait times before assuming a gap exists.

Days 15-60: If pursuing this, complete the skill-building step — a class or informal apprenticeship — before buying equipment. Skill comes before capital in this trade.

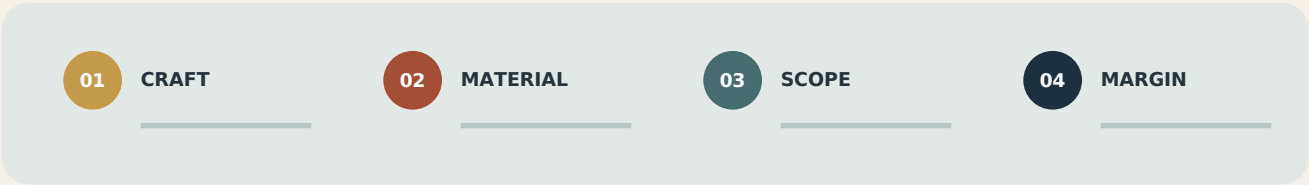
Days 61-90: Take on one automotive or marine job specifically, not general furniture, to test the differentiated angle.

The one metric that matters: whether the automotive/marine niche generates inquiries the two general shops aren't already fielding. If it doesn't differentiate, this is a crowded trade with no real opening.



STRUCTURAL FIRST | Inspect and repair the frame, joinery, webbing, springs, and padding before final covering.

Honest Assessment

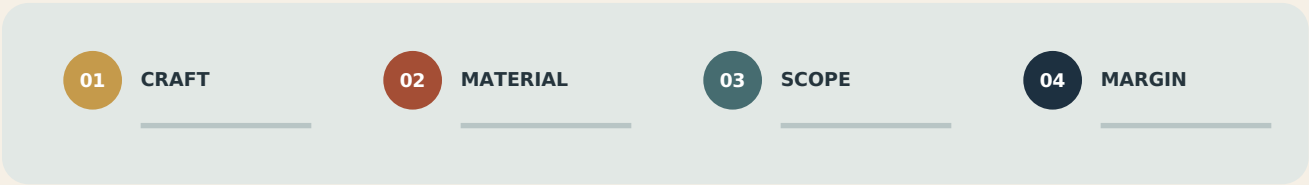


Established shops in a niche trade are a real signal. The version worth considering may not be a general upholstery shop, but a specific automotive or marine specialty that existing shops do not emphasize. Before spending on equipment, confirm whether that specialty is actually underserved and treat the skill-building step as the real prerequisite it is, not something to rush past.

BUSINESS LENS	CONTROL
Craft	Accept only work that matches current sewing, pattern, structure, and finish capability.
Scope	Document the item, condition, materials, hidden-risk assumptions, and approved restoration.
Margin	Price labor, material yield, freight, rework, and pickup or delivery before accepting the job.

CORE REFERENCE

Startup Cost Reference

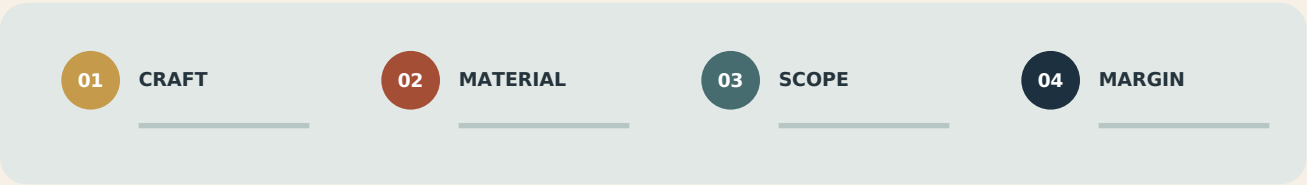


Use the source ranges as planning inputs, then replace each with actual training, equipment, material, insurance, and workspace quotes.

Item	Est. Cost	Planning Note
Upholstery classes or apprenticeship	Varies	This is the real prerequisite, not a formality. Check community colleges, trade schools, workshops, or qualified mentors [VERIFY].
Industrial sewing machine	\$500-\$2,000 used	A used industrial machine is far more capable than a home machine for this work
Air compressor and pneumatic stapler	\$150-\$400	Confirm capacity, guarding, hose control, and maintenance [VERIFY]
Staple remover, fabric scissors, upholstery needles	\$50-\$150	
Foam cutter	\$50-\$150	
Measuring tools, work tables, hand tools	\$200-\$500	
Fabric, leather, vinyl starter stock	\$300-\$1,000	Build supplier relationships rather than buying speculative inventory — order per job at first
General liability insurance	Standard small trade rate	Confirm customer-property, pickup or delivery, product, and workshop coverage [VERIFY]

CORE REFERENCE

Source Pricing Framework



The source provides positioning rather than fixed dollar amounts. Confirm material, labor, freight, overhead, market, and margin before quoting.

Tier	Service	Price	Positioning
Low	Cushion replacement or simple repair	Confirm current market range [VERIFY]	Entry job, builds the portfolio
Mid	Full chair or single-seat reupholstery	Mid-range [VERIFY]	
Premium	Automotive interior or boat-seat reupholstery	Price for specialty skill and materials [VERIFY]	A differentiated specialty that existing shops may not emphasize

WORKSHEET 01

Startup Checklist

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DONE	ACTION	OWNER DATE NOTES
☐	Call active upholstery providers and confirm turnaround, minimums, specialties, and unserved inquiries in the intended area.	
☐	Choose a launch specialty: furniture repair, cushion work, automotive, marine, commercial seating, or another verified niche.	
☐	Document actual sewing, pattern, frame, spring, foam, finish, and material skill; arrange training or apprenticeship where needed [VERIFY].	
☐	Check licensing, zoning, and tax rules for your own city and state before starting.	
☐	Confirm consumer, fire, textile, flammability, chemical, ventilation, waste, transport, tax, and record requirements [VERIFY].	
☐	Obtain general liability, property, tools, customer-property, commercial auto, workers, and product coverage quotes [VERIFY].	
☐	Plan a clean workflow for intake, photography, disassembly, patterning, cutting, sewing, structure, padding, covering, inspection, and storage.	
☐	Build supplier relationships for fabric, leather, vinyl, foam, batting, webbing, springs, hardware, adhesives, and special orders.	
☐	Create item intake, condition, estimate, deposit, change order, material approval, pickup or delivery, completion, and warranty records.	
☐	Complete one small paid specialty project and capture truthful before-and-after portfolio images with permission.	
☐	Track inquiries by niche, quoted labor hours, material yield, turnaround, change orders, rework, and gross margin.	

WORKSHEET 02

Equipment and Budget Worksheet

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WORKSHOP KIT | Organize cutting, removal, fastening, sewing, measuring, padding, and sample-control tools.

ITEM	NEEDED	ESTIMATE	ACTUAL	NOTES
Classes, apprenticeship, practice materials, reference patterns, and skill development				
Industrial sewing machine, table, motor, feet, needles, bobbins, maintenance, and electrical setup				
Compressor, pneumatic stapler, hose, regulator, fasteners, and maintenance				
Shears, cutters, staple removers, tack tools, stretchers, measuring, and hand tools				
Worktables, racks, lighting, cutting surface, storage, dust control, and ventilation [VERIFY]				
Foam cutter, padding tools, clamps, frame repair, spring, webbing, and finish equipment				
Fabric, leather, vinyl, foam, batting, thread, zippers, trim, adhesive, and consumables				
Workspace, zoning, utilities, security, fire control, waste, delivery access, and storage [VERIFY]				
Insurance, registration, licenses, permits, tax, contracts, and bookkeeping [VERIFY]				
Vehicle, blankets, straps, carts, lifting aids, pickup, delivery, and customer-property controls				
Working capital, supplier deposits, freight, special orders, remakes, damage, warranty, and reserve				

BUDGET CONTROL

TOTAL ESTIMATE: _____ TOTAL ACTUAL: _____ CASH RESERVE: _____

WORKSHEET 03

Pricing and Estimate Template

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CLIENT	SERVICE LOCATION	ESTIMATE NUMBER	DATE

SERVICE OR INPUT	BASIS	AMOUNT
Item intake and condition assessment	Photos, measurements, structure, and hidden-risk notes	
Disassembly and removal	Estimated labor hours	
Frame, joinery, spring, or webbing repair	Scope and labor	
Foam, batting, padding, and cushion work	Specification and quantity	
Fabric, leather, vinyl, trim, thread, and hardware	Yardage, yield, quantity, and allowance	
Patterning, cutting, sewing, fitting, and finishing	Estimated labor hours	
Special order, freight, rush, or supplier fee [VERIFY]	Written basis	
Pickup, delivery, stairs, or installation [VERIFY]	Written basis	
Tax [VERIFY]	Applicable treatment	
Total estimate		

TOTAL ESTIMATE	DEPOSIT OR AUTHORIZATION	VALID THROUGH

WORKSHEET 04

Upholstery Project Authorization

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FIELD	AGREED DETAIL
Customer, contact, item owner, billing address, pickup, delivery, and access details	
Item description, maker or label, dimensions, quantity, age, sentimental value, and photos	
Existing condition, damage, odor, stain, pests, contamination, prior repair, and hidden-risk notes	
Frame, joinery, springs, webbing, padding, foam, cushions, mechanisms, finish, and hardware condition	
Authorized disassembly, repair, replacement, pattern, sewing, padding, covering, trim, and finish scope	
Selected material, supplier, color, pattern, repeat, direction, performance, care, and customer approval	
Yardage or quantity allowance, remnant ownership, dye-lot, availability, backorder, freight, and substitution [VERIFY]	
Customer-supplied material, suitability, defects, shortage, labor, and warranty terms [VERIFY]	
Estimate, labor basis, material deposit, minimum, change order, tax, balance, and payment terms	
Hidden-condition discovery, approval threshold, revised estimate, delay, refusal, and cancellation procedure	
Pickup, transport, stairs, doorway, storage, delivery, installation, damage, and site-access terms	
Target schedule, material arrival, queue position, customer delay, storage, and completion notice	
Care instructions, color or texture variation, wear, comfort, fire label, warranty, and exclusions [VERIFY]	
Portfolio photography, privacy, property release, disposal, donation, and removed-material decisions [VERIFY]	
Customer and workshop signatures	

WORKSHEET 05

Invoice Template

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BUSINESS	CLIENT	INVOICE NUMBER	DATE DUE

DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY	RATE	AMOUNT
Assessment and disassembly			
Structural repair			
Foam and padding			
Cover material and trim			
Patterning, sewing, fitting, and finish labor			
Freight or special order			
Pickup or delivery			
Approved change order			

SUMMARY	AMOUNT
Subtotal	
Tax [VERIFY]	
Credits / adjustments	
Total	
Balance due	

Job Log and Lead Tracker

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DATE	LEAD SOURCE	NEED OR SCOPE	QUOTE	STATUS NEXT STEP

DATE	CUSTOMER	ITEM / NICHE	QUOTE	STATUS	TURNAROUND

ONE METRIC

SPECIALTY INQUIRIES: _____ QUOTE-TO-JOB RATE: _____ ACTUAL TURNAROUND: _____

WORKSHEET 07

Upholstery Compliance and Safety

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Check licensing, zoning, and tax rules for your own city and state before starting.

CHECK	CONTROL	INITIALS NOTES
☐	Licensing, zoning, tax, consumer, fire, textile, flammability, chemical, waste, transport, and local rules are confirmed [VERIFY].	
☐	General liability, property, tools, customer-property, commercial auto, workers, and product coverage are confirmed [VERIFY].	
☐	Item intake screens for pests, mold, bodily fluids, needles, sharp hardware, unstable frames, contamination, odor, and unsafe materials.	
☐	Sewing machines, cutters, staplers, compressors, hand tools, electrical equipment, guards, disconnects, maintenance, and training are controlled.	
☐	Ventilation, dust, foam, fibers, adhesives, solvents, finishes, chemical labels, PPE, ignition, fire, spill, storage, and disposal are controlled [VERIFY].	
☐	Worktables, cutting technique, lifting aids, carts, team lifts, posture, repetitive motion, lighting, housekeeping, and access paths are planned.	
☐	Customer materials, antiques, sentimental items, hidden damage, photos, custody, storage, security, transport, approval, and release are documented.	
☐	Material suitability, care, performance, fire or code requirements, supplier records, substitutions, remnants, and warranties are documented [VERIFY].	
☐	Work stops when contamination, structure, material, tool condition, ventilation, fire risk, skill, scope, authorization, or safe handling is uncertain.	

STOP RULE

Do not begin or continue work until the item is safely assessed, contamination and structural risks are controlled, the craft capability and tools fit the job, materials and scope are approved, customer property is documented, and the work can be completed safely.