CLEANING, LANDSCAPING AND PROPERTY SERVICES

A playbook for recurring-service businesses: low startup costs, route planning, staffing and building contracts that pay every month.

TYPE: PLAYBOOK REVIEWED: NOVEMBER 2026 TIME: 12 MINUTES LEVEL: BEGINNER

AT A GLANCE

- Cleaning, landscaping, pool, pest and property-maintenance businesses can start with **low costs** and grow through **recurring customers**.
- The keys are **efficient routes, reliable staff, and contracts** for weekly or monthly service.
- Recurring contracts make the business **more valuable** to lenders, investors and future buyers. See **X-03 How Businesses Are Valued When They're Sold**.

WATCH OUT

Figures are general, illustrative ranges as of the review date. Pest control and some landscaping work (like applying chemicals) may require special licenses.

Startup costs (illustrative)

Item	Notes
Equipment and supplies	Cleaning supplies and vacuums, or mowers and trimmers
Vehicle	Often your own at first, then a business vehicle
Insurance and bonding	General liability; bonding is common for cleaning businesses entering homes
Licenses	Business license; special licenses for pest control or chemical application
Booking and route software	Scheduling, reminders, payments
Uniforms and branding	Builds trust when entering homes and businesses

How the money works (illustrative)

Line	Share of revenue
Revenue	100%
Labor (including payroll taxes)	45% to 60%
Supplies and fuel	5% to 12%
Vehicles and equipment	4% to 8%
Insurance, software, office, marketing	8% to 12%
Profit before owner pay	**Often 10% to 20%**

Recurring revenue

> EXAMPLE
>
> **Rosa** moved clients from one-time cleanings to **weekly and biweekly plans** with a small discount. Recurring clients rose to 70% of revenue. That made scheduling predictable, reduced marketing costs, and gave her steady income to show lenders. When she later talked to investors, recurring contracts were one of the strongest parts of her story.

Route density

Travel time is unpaid time. **Grouping customers by area** raises jobs per day and cuts fuel.

- Market neighborhood by neighborhood.
- Offer discounts for referrals in the same area.
- Assign crews to zones.

Numbers to track

KPI	What it tells you
Share of recurring revenue	Stability
Jobs per crew per day	Efficiency
Revenue per labor hour	Pricing and productivity
Customer churn	Service quality
Callbacks or complaints	Quality
Staff turnover	Hiring and management

Hiring and staffing

- Hire for **reliability and trustworthiness**; train for skill.
- Use **checklists** for consistent quality. See **O-06 Systems and Checklists: Running the Business Without Doing Everything Yourself**.
- Treat workers correctly as employees or contractors. See **O-02 Employees vs. Contractors**.

- Pay fairly and recognize good work; turnover is expensive.

Funding

- Savings and equipment financing. See **R-07 Equipment Financing and Lines of Credit**.
- Microloans. See **R-05 Microloans and Community Lenders**.
- Lines of credit for payroll timing on commercial contracts. See **R-07 Equipment Financing and Lines of Credit**.

Ways to grow

- **Commercial contracts**: offices, property managers, homeowner associations. See **G-07 Landing Big Customers and Partners**.
- **Add-on services**: deep cleaning, windows, seasonal cleanups, snow removal
- **Government contracts.** See **G-08 Government Contracts and Supplier Diversity Programs**.
- **Buying smaller competitors'** customer routes

Common mistakes

- **Pricing by the job without knowing time and cost**
- **Customers spread across a wide area**
- **No written service agreements**
- **Skipping bonding and insurance**
- **Relying on one big commercial client**

Launch checklist

- ☐ Get liability insurance and bonding
- ☐ Set prices by the hour and by service type
- ☐ Create recurring service plans
- ☐ Choose a target neighborhood and market densely there
- ☐ Write quality checklists for each service
- ☐ Set up booking, reminders and automatic payments

Where to go next

- **P-05 Trades and Home Services**
- **L-05 Marketing Basics: Reaching Your First 100 Customers**
- **O-06 Systems and Checklists: Running the Business Without Doing Everything Yourself**

IMPORTANT
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