

HR Checklist for Startups

Your Complete Implementation Guide

A Step-by-Step Framework for Building Compliant, Scalable HR Systems

Company Stage	Employees	Key Focus
Foundation	0-10	Legal basics, first hires
Building	11-50	Systems & processes
Growth	51-200	Scaling & optimization

How to Use This Checklist

This checklist is designed to guide startup founders and first-time HR/People Ops hires through building a compliant, scalable HR foundation. Use it as a roadmap, not a rigid rulebook—adapt items based on your industry, location, and growth stage.

Understanding the Three Growth Stages

Foundation (0-10 employees): Focus on legal compliance, first hires, and basic systems. Speed matters, but get the fundamentals right to avoid costly fixes later.

Building (11-50 employees): Implement structured processes for recruiting, onboarding, and performance management. This is when you transition from ad-hoc to systematic HR.

Growth (51-200 employees): Scale your systems, introduce HR technology, and prepare for audits. Optimize existing processes and build for the next phase of growth.

Priority Levels

Priority	Definition	When to Complete
Critical	Legal requirement or business blocker	Immediately
Important	Prevents future problems	Within 30-90 days
Nice-to-Have	Enhances employee experience	When resources allow

Using the Score Tracker (Page 5)

Check off each item as you complete it, then calculate your total score on Page 5. Your score determines your HR Maturity Level and helps you identify gaps. Revisit this checklist quarterly as your company grows to ensure you're staying ahead of HR needs.

The Complete HR Checklist for Startups

STEP 1: HR STRATEGY & FOUNDATION

- Define mission, vision, company values [Critical] [All stages]
- Align HR strategy with business goals [Critical] [All stages]
- Create initial org structure [Critical] [0-10]
- Set HR KPIs (Time-to-Hire, Cost-per-Hire, eNPS) [Important] [All stages]

STEP 2: LEGAL & COMPLIANCE

- Classify employees vs. contractors correctly [Critical] [All stages]
- Review applicable labor laws (FLSA, FMLA, etc.) [Critical] [All stages]
- Create employee handbook [Critical] [11-50]
- Draft workplace policies & code of conduct [Critical] [11-50]
- Establish complaint/grievance procedure [Important] [11-50]
- Set quarterly compliance review calendar [Important] [All stages]

STEP 3: WORKFORCE PLANNING

- Identify talent needs & skill gaps [Critical] [All stages]
- Plan hiring by growth stage [Important] [All stages]
- Budget for fully loaded labor costs (1.25-1.4x salary) [Critical] [All stages]

STEP 4: RECRUITING & HIRING

- Write clear, compliant job descriptions [Critical] [All stages]
- Define recruitment channels [Important] [All stages]
- Create resume screening workflow [Important] [11-50]
- Implement structured interview process [Critical] [All stages]
- Set up background checks & I-9 verification [Critical] [All stages]
- Prepare offer letter templates [Critical] [0-10]
- Conduct compensation benchmarking [Important] [All stages]

STEP 5: ONBOARDING (First 90 Days)

- Create pre-boarding email & prep checklist [Critical] [All stages]
- Design day-one onboarding experience [Critical] [All stages]
- Schedule first-week training & orientation [Critical] [All stages]
- Deliver mandatory compliance training [Critical] [All stages]

- Set 30-60-90 day goals & check-ins [[Critical](#)] [*All stages*]

STEP 6: PAYROLL & BENEFITS

- Set up payroll provider (Gusto, Rippling, Deel) [[Critical](#)] [*0-10*]
- Determine pay schedule (bi-weekly/semi-monthly) [[Critical](#)] [*0-10*]
- Provide mandatory statutory benefits [[Critical](#)] [*All stages*]
- Plan optional benefits (health, equity, PTO) [[Important](#)] [*11-50*]
- Define equity & vesting schedule (4yr/1yr cliff) [[Important](#)] [*0-10*]

STEP 7: EMPLOYEE RECORDS & DATA

- Structure personnel files [[Critical](#)] [*All stages*]
- Set up time, attendance, leave tracking [[Important](#)] [*11-50*]
- Ensure data privacy compliance (GDPR, CCPA) [[Critical](#)] [*All stages*]
- Implement secure document storage [[Critical](#)] [*All stages*]

STEP 8: PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

- Define performance expectations [[Important](#)] [*All stages*]
- Schedule performance review cycles [[Important](#)] [*11-50*]
- Create learning & development plans [[Nice-to-Have](#)] [*11-50*]
- Plan career growth & mobility paths [[Nice-to-Have](#)] [*51-200*]
- Document underperformance & PIP process [[Important](#)] [*11-50*]

STEP 9: CULTURE & RETENTION

- Reinforce company culture & values [[Important](#)] [*All stages*]
- Implement employee recognition system [[Important](#)] [*11-50*]
- Conduct engagement surveys [[Important](#)] [*11-50*]
- Train managers on communication [[Important](#)] [*11-50*]
- Track retention metrics [[Critical](#)] [*All stages*]

STEP 10: OFFBOARDING & HR RISK

- Create termination procedure (voluntary/involuntary) [[Important](#)] [*11-50*]
- Ensure legal compliance during exits [[Critical](#)] [*All stages*]
- Plan knowledge transfer & access removal [[Critical](#)] [*All stages*]
- Conduct exit interviews [[Important](#)] [*11-50*]

STEP 11: HR TECHNOLOGY

- Decide when to introduce HRIS [[Important](#)] [*11-50*]
- Select payroll & benefits platforms [[Critical](#)] [*0-10*]
- Implement document management tools [[Important](#)] [*11-50*]

- Build minimum viable HR tech stack [Nice-to-Have] [51-200]

STEP 12: AUDITS & COMPLIANCE REVIEWS

- Schedule internal HR audits [Important] [11-50]
- Review policies quarterly [Important] [All stages]
- Prepare for external audits & due diligence [Important] [51-200]

STEP 13: HR ACTION PLAN

- List immediate priorities (first 30 days) [Critical] [All stages]
- Define short-term goals (next 90 days) [Critical] [All stages]
- Draft long-term roadmap (12-24 months) [Important] [All stages]
- Assign ownership & timelines [Critical] [All stages]

Total Items: 60 | Calculate your HR Maturity Score now

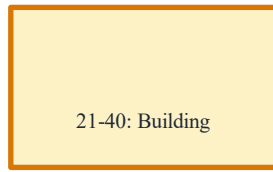
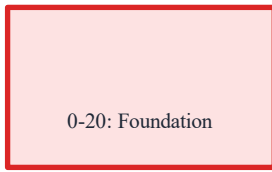
Your HR Maturity Score Tracker

Count the number of items you've completed from Pages 3-4 and calculate your HR Maturity Level below.

Your Completed Items:	_____ / 60
Completion Rate:	_____ %

HR Maturity Levels

Score Range	Maturity Level	Status	Action Required
0-20	Foundation Stage	High Risk	Start with Critical items immediately
21-40	Building Stage	Moderate Risk	Complete Important items within 90 days
41-55	Growth Stage	Low Risk	Polish processes and prepare to scale
56-60	Mature Stage	Best Practice	Maintain systems and optimize continuously



← Mark your score here →

Focus on completing all 'Critical' items first, then 'Important' items. Revisit this checklist quarterly as your company grows and your needs evolve.