

Resources for Doing Business with Federal Agencies and Prime Contractors

Office of Federal Contract Assistance to Women Business Owners

In October 2002, the Office of Federal Contract Assistance to Women Business Owners (CAWBO) was established at the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) within the Office of Government Contracting and Business Development. Its mission is to work closely with the other Federal agencies and Federal prime contractors to open up more contracting opportunities for Women-Owned Small Businesses (WOSBs), and to reach or surpass the established goals of five percent of awards in both Federal contract and subcontract dollars.

PRO-Net and the CCR (to register with PRO-Net and the CCR, visit the “Getting Started” section of Womenbiz.gov)

PRO-Net is the SBA’s free online database of small businesses. It is searched by contracting officers and prime contractors seeking small businesses in particular industries and locations, often by the type of ownership, e.g., WOSB. It is an excellent marketing tool for WOSBs to gain instant and wide exposure to the Federal contracting community. A firm may self-certify that it is small and woman-owned (meaning that at least 51 percent of the ownership and the control is by one or more women). A firm may also provide information about the services or supplies it provides, plus a listing of awards or other favorable past performance information. Firms may access information regarding their correct industry code(s), the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) Code(s) for their products or services at www.census.gov/naics. The correct NAICS code(s) are essential for registration in PRO-Net and for certain contracting requirements.

The CCR has become the single point of vendor registration for the Federal government, including PRO-Net. Although PRO-Net interfaces with the CCR, it remains the authoritative source for certified 8(a) businesses, Small Disadvantaged Businesses (SDBs) and Historically Underutilized Business Zone (HUBZone) small businesses. Registration in the CCR is required to participate in DoD procurements. Therefore, prospective DoD contractors must register in the CCR, at www.ccr.gov. Beginning in the fall of 2003, payment by any Federal agency will require registration in CCR.

Small businesses seeking Federal contracts or subcontracts should also register in the CCR. Registration by small businesses in the CCR will automatically result in registration in PRO-Net. A DUNS number and yearly updates by each registrant will be required. (DUNS numbers are assigned by the Dun and Bradstreet firm, which maintains financial data on registered firms.)

Subcontracting (for more information on these programs, visit the “Getting Started” section of Womenbiz.gov)

Government subcontracts provide marketing opportunities for small businesses. Federal prime contractors are required to use their best efforts to subcontract to WOSBs and other small businesses, including veteran-owned, SDB and HUBZone small businesses. SBA’s Subcontracting Opportunities Directory, www.sba.gov/GC/contacts.html, lists contacts for many of these large firms. Look under “Small Business Liaison Officer” (SBLO) or “Supplier Diversity Program” for their subcontracting offices.

The www.sba.gov/GC/contacts.html Web site also lists SBA Government Contracting staff, including Procurement Center Representatives (PCRs) and Commercial Market Representatives (CMRs), who assist in marketing to Federal buying activities and their prime contractors. PCRs are procurement professionals who assist small businesses in identifying contracts at Federal buying offices. Businesses may also search the new SBA SUB-Net Program (part of PRO-Net) for subcontract opportunities at <http://web.sba.gov/subnet/>. (More information on this program is available by clicking on “Subcontracting” in the “Finding Business Opportunities” section of Womenbiz.gov.) Further, firms are encouraged to contact the prime contractors’ Small Business Liaison Offices or Supplier Diversity Program offices, give their status as a WOSB, and provide a capabilities statement and a record of the firm’s past performance.

Certification (for more information about certification requirements and procedures, visit the “Additional Information” section of the “Getting Started” page on Womenbiz.gov)

At this time there is no certification procedure *required* for women-owned businesses for Federal procurement. WOSBs may self-certify for procurements, and may register as WOSBs in PRO-Net. However, some prime contractors do require third-party certification. There are two private national women’s business organizations that certify qualified women-owned businesses.

One of these is the Women’s Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC). See <http://wbenc.org>, or call 202-872-5515. The second is the National Women’s Business Owners Corporation (NWBOC). See <http://www.nwboc.org>, or call the NWBOC at 561-881-7364. Each organization has an extensive list of large corporations that accept its certification. They each charge a yearly fee of several hundred dollars for certification.

While it is not necessary to be certified to participate in Federal contracting, it is a requirement to participate in certain procurement programs. SBA has several procurement assistance programs that eligible WOSBs are encouraged to use. They are the Historically Underutilized Business Zone (HUBZone) Program at www.sba.gov/hubzone, the 8(a) Program (8(a)) at www.sba.gov/8abd, and the Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB) Program at www.sba.gov/sdb. An additional

The GSA SmartPay Purchase Card (*for more information on this topic visit the U.S. General Services Administration section of the “Getting Started” page on Womenbiz.gov*)

This card, available through partnering banks, provides an excellent way to get started with Federal procurement. More than 250,000 Federal government employees are using the GSA SmartPay purchase card, which is a preferred government method of payment. Therefore, all small businesses, including WOSBs, should be ready to accept one or more of the four cards under this program in order to increase contracting opportunities. Accepting all four cards will maximize these opportunities. For more information, visit GSA’s Web site at <http://pub.fss.gsa.gov/services/gsa-smartpay>, or call (703) 305-6658.