How does a business get certified as woman owned?

**Federal Government.** The federal government does not certify woman owned businesses as such, but relies on a self-certification. The Federal government and its large prime contractors have goals for utilization of businesses owned and operated by women. If you plan to do business with the Federal government, you must first be registered with the Central Contractor Registration (CCR) found at: www.bpn.gov/CCR. It’s the primary registrant database for the Federal government to collect, validate, store and disseminate data in support of agency acquisition missions. Also, you must be registered in Online Representations and Certifications Application (ORCA) if the solicitation you are responding to requires that you have an active registration in CCR. The ORCA site can be found by going to www.bpn.gov and clicking on “Online Reps and Certs Application” on the left side of the screen. CCR and ORCA are complementary systems. ORCA reuses data pulled from CCR and pre-populates many of the required Representations and Certifications.

If a woman business owner has been the victim of chronic and substantial discrimination, she might be eligible to participate in the SBA’s 8(a) Business Development Program. Eligibility in this program is based on the individual(s) personal social and economic disadvantage. There is an application process. Under this program, women as a group are not automatically presumed to be socially disadvantaged. To qualify as socially disadvantaged, women must demonstrate that they personally have been discriminated against in the areas of education, employment, or business due to their membership in a group (i.e. women). The burden of proof in evaluating an application was reduced to “preponderance of the evidence” from “clear and convincing evidence” in 1998. This makes it easier for women business owners to be accepted into the program. Participants in the 8(a) Business Development Program may obtain federal contracts on a non-competitive basis. The federal government web-site for women-owned businesses selling to the government is www.womenbiz.gov and www.sba.gov/wosb. Additional information available at 612-370-2324 or, www.sba.gov/mn.

Women-owned small businesses can begin taking steps to participate in a new federal contracting program. The Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) Federal Contract Program will provide greater access to federal contracting opportunities for WOSBs and economically-disadvantaged women-owned small businesses (EDWOSBs). The Program allows contracting officers, for the first time, to set aside specific contracts for certified WOSBs and EDWOSBs and will help federal agencies achieve the existing statutory goal of five percent of federal contracting dollars being awarded to WOSBs. To qualify as a WOSB, a firm must be at least 51 percent owned and controlled by one or more women, and primarily managed by one or more women. The women must be U.S. citizens and the firm must be considered small according to SBA size standards. To be deemed “economically disadvantaged,” a firm’s owners must meet specific financial requirements set forth in the program regulations. For more information on the Women-Owned Small Business Program or to access the instructions, applications or database please visit: www.sba.gov/wosb.

**State Government.** The State of Minnesota has two certification programs of interest to businesses owned and operated by women: the Targeted Group Business Program and the Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) Program. These certifications are sometimes recognized (depending on the circumstances, funding source, etc.) by other government entities such as the Metro Council, Metropolitan Airports Commission, and the University of Minnesota.

The State Department of Administration, Materials Management Division operates the Targeted Group and Economically Disadvantaged Small Business Program. There is an application process and businesses owned and operated by women may be eligible for the program. Certification may allow businesses a price preference when bidding directly to the state. The state also has the authority to set Targeted Group subcontracting goals on contracts for construction and professional/technical services. Preferences and subcontracting opportunities are offered by Targeted Group category (i.e. women, Hispanic, black, etc.) based on the results of periodic disparity studies. Additional information is available at 651-296-2600 or at www.mmd.admin.state.mn.us.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MN/DOT) Office of EEO Contract Management along with the Metropolitan Council (MET Council), the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) and the City of Minneapolis are responsible for the certification of firms as Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) under Federal regulations listed in 49 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 26. Woman-owned firms are eligible for certification as DBEs. A qualified small business may submit its certification package to any of the three agencies listed above. Federally-funded prime contracts with MN/DOT, MET Council and MAC may contain goals for DBE participation. In addition, DBEs may qualify for technical assistance through MN/DOT. Additional information is available at 651-297-1376 or, from MET Council at 651-602-1188.
**Local Government.** The Central Certification (CERT) Program is a small business certification program sponsored collaboratively by four local government jurisdictions: Hennepin County, Ramsey County and City of St. Paul. Small, minority- and woman-owned businesses are encouraged to apply for certification through the CERT program. Rather than operating separate certification efforts as they have in the past, the collaborative members have come together to create a “one-stop shop” for certification. Eligible business owners desiring to be certified by any or all of the participating jurisdictions now submit a single, standard application to a central processing location. Each application received is then evaluated using a uniform set of certification criteria. Certified businesses receive increased market exposure through inclusion in directories of certified vendors that are regularly distributed to purchasing officials in various jurisdictions. In addition, some prime contracts contain goals for certified businesses. Additional information is available by contacting the City of St. Paul at 651-266-8900.

**Non government, Third Party Certification:** The Women’s Business Development Center (WBDC) in Chicago, IL, a co-founder of the Women’s Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC), provides national certification and procurement services for women-owned businesses throughout the Midwest. The WBDC has a satellite office in Minneapolis offering certification to companies in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and western Wisconsin. The WBDC’s Women Business Enterprise (WBE) certification process verifies that a business is at least 51% independently-owned, operated and controlled by women. Apply online at: [http://www.wbenc.org](http://www.wbenc.org). MN contact: Natasha Fedorova, Program Manager, WBDC-MN, 612-259-6584, or nfedorova@wbdc.org.

06/12