

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO CERTIFYING YOUR

Woman-Owned Business



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We're SupplierGateway

We've been connecting buyers and suppliers to create more resilient and diverse supply chains since 1997.

What does that mean for you as a small, woman-owned business? It means that we're committed to helping you find more opportunities and connecting you with more of the clients you want to have.

The first step in getting the types of clients you'd really like to have is getting your woman-owned business certified, and we'll show you how to get certified in this guide by:

1. Defining what qualifies your business as woman-owned.
2. Giving you a real-world explanation about why getting certified. is important for you and your business.
3. Walking you through the different ways to get certified, including our own Enhanced Digital Certification, an all-in-one certification that covers all diverse and small business categories.



Let's get you on the path to certification! ➔



What is a Woman Owned Business?

To qualify as a woman-owned business (WOB) according to the federal government's definition, your company must be at least 51% owned, operated, and controlled by a woman or group of women.

What Does This Mean?



As the majority owner of a WOB, you'll make the key decisions and oversee the daily management and operations. You'll control which contracts and financial obligations the business takes on.

Essentially, you call the shots.

To certify as a woman-owned business, you'll have to meet certain requirements around ownership and control. Specifically, a woman or group of women must own at least 51% of the business, hold the highest officer position, manage day-to-day operations, and make long-term decisions on finances, management, and strategy.

Why Get Certified?



Certifying your business as woman-owned opens you up to new business opportunities like qualifying for diversity contracting programs with government agencies and large corporations.

Many organizations are focused on increasing opportunities for minority and women-owned businesses, as well.

Certifying your woman-owned business also makes your business more attractive for potential buyers to do business with. Many large organizations have supplier diversity programs, and those programs often include goals regarding spending more money with woman-owned businesses.



However, in order to count woman-owned business spend towards diversity spending goals, businesses generally prefer for the supplier to be certified by an independent third party. When you certify your business as woman-owned, you make it easy and less risky for buyers to count the money they spend with you towards their supplier diversity goals.



Start Your EDC Application!

Working a side gig? Starting your own business, or self-employed?

Enhanced Digital Certification is the only diversity certification designed especially for freelancers and solopreneurs. [Get started now.](#)



Requirements for WBE Certification

To become certified as a woman-owned business enterprise (WBE), you'll need to meet several requirements. Each certification has similar criteria, but there may be small differences in their processes.

Ownership

For WBE certification, at least 51% of your business must be owned by a woman or women. This means a woman or women control the majority share of the business ownership and equity. Be prepared to provide legal documents like articles of incorporation, operating agreements, and stock ledgers as evidence

Control and Management

You'll need to demonstrate that the woman owner(s) actively manages daily business operations. This could include things like:

1. Making Strategic decisions
 2. Supervising staff
-
3. Overseeing contracts
 4. Developing policies and procedures

The woman owner(s) must have the power to direct the management and policies of the company. Be ready to provide resumes, organization charts, and job descriptions to prove control and management.



Business Viability

To qualify for a certification from WBENC, your business must be a legally formed, for-profit entity that has been in operation, generally, for at least one year. There are caveats for businesses that have been in operation for less than a year. You'll need to provide significant documentation for your business operations, which can be found [here](#). Your company should also generate revenue through providing goods or services to public or private sector clients.

Supplier Gateway will certify those who are self-employed, freelancers who do not have an S-Corp or another type of formed business, as well as those who have LLCs, S-Corps, C-Corps, DBAs, and incorporated businesses, including those newly formed. You can find documentation requirements for Supplier Gateway's Enhanced Digital Certification [here](#).



Site Visits

WBENC conducts an initial site visit to verify information and evaluate operations. They want to confirm that what you've claimed on paper matches what's really happening day-to-day in your business. WBENC also conducts a site visit every three years after you've been certified should you wish to maintain your certification status.

Supplier Gateway does not require or conduct site visits, which means your business can be certified quickly. NAWBO also does not require site visits.



The Certification Process

To become a certified woman-owned business, you'll need to go through an official certification process.

Below we've outlined the general steps of the certification process, though these steps will differ depending on which certification you apply for.

Here's what you can expect

Determine Which Woman-Owned Business Certification You Want To Pursue

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The two main options are self-certification through the SBA as a Woman-Owned Small Business (WOSB) or an Economically Disadvantaged Woman-Owned Small Business (EDWOSB), or third party certification through an organization like WBENC, NAWBO, or SupplierGateway. Both WBENC and NAWBO only certify US-based businesses.

SupplierGateway certifies businesses globally. Enhanced Digital Certification is available to women-owned businesses in the US, Canada, UK, and several African countries and will continue to expand in Europe, Asia, and The Americas

Meet Eligibility Requirements

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For SBA, WBENC, and SupplierGateway certification, your business must be at least 51% owned and controlled by women who are U.S. citizens. You'll need to provide ownership and operational details to prove this.

Compile The Necessary Paperwork.



This includes things like business licenses and permits, ownership documentation, business financials, and personal financials of the majority women owners. Be prepared to share tax returns, bank statements, resumes, and more. You can see documentation requirements for WBENC [here](#), and for SupplierGateway [here](#).

Complete and Submit The Application.



The SBA, WBENC, and SupplierGateway have online applications to fill out. Answer all questions thoroughly and honestly, and submit them along with your supporting documents. The review process typically takes a few months for the SBA and WBENC, but SupplierGateway typically issues your certification within 72 hours.

Undergo a Site Visit (for WBENC only)



If pursuing WBENC certification, an on-site review of your business will be scheduled. WBENC representatives will evaluate your operations and make sure everything matches what was presented in your application. Scheduling the site visit can take several months

Receive Your Certification Determination



If your application is approved, congratulations! Your certification is valid for 1 year (NAWBO, WBENC) or up to 3 years (EDC). You'll need to re-certify to maintain your status. If your application is denied, you'll be given details on how to improve your application for the future.



The Benefits of Being Certified

Becoming a certified woman-owned business offers several advantages to help your company gain more opportunities and exposure.



Standing Out From Competition

Being certified helps your business stand out from potential competitors. A buyer won't select you solely because you are certified; however, all other qualifications being equal, a buyer may select you over another competitor because your business is certified as woman-owned and can therefore be counted towards any supplier diversity goals.

Ultimately, being certified makes it easier for a potential buyer to get the most value out of their relationship with you as a supplier, and that's why a buyer is more likely to choose a woman-owned business that is certified rather than a woman-owned business that is not certified.



Increased Visibility

Certification helps increase your visibility and credibility when competing for contracts against larger organizations. It verifies your status as a woman-owned business, allowing you to be found more easily by corporations and government agencies looking to do business with diverse suppliers.

Each of the certifying organizations keeps a database of those they've certified and large organizations access these databases when searching for new certified, woman-owned businesses to do business with.





Access To Federal Funds and Contracts

Certified woman-owned business enterprises (WBEs) may have access to federal funds and contracts set aside specifically for woman-owned and minority-owned businesses. Many major corporations also have diversity spending programs that give preference to certified minority-owned businesses, including women-owned vendors.



Networking and Educational Opportunities

Obtaining certification provides access to valuable networking and educational opportunities. You can connect with other women business owners, share advice, find mentors, and learn new skills through events, conferences, and online communities offered by certifying agencies and advocacy organizations





Final Thoughts

Becoming a certified woman-owned business is a proven strategy for gaining credibility, expanding your reach, winning new clients, and tapping into new revenue streams. While the process may require time and money upfront, certification can open up a world of opportunities for your company and help ensure its long-term growth and success.



Ready To Get Certified?

SupplierGateway wants to support your certification journey.

As a thank you for reading this guide, and as part of our mission to certify **10 million freelancers**, solopreneurs, gig-workers, and small businesses, we're giving you your first year of Enhanced Digital Certification for free! Simply click the button below to start the application process.

START YOUR EDC APPLICATION

Here's what to expect



Register

Register your business in our portal.



Answer Questions

Answer questions about your business.



ID Verification

Upload and verify your ID with a biometric scan



Checks & Screening

We check to make sure your information is accurate



Certificate Issued

Your certificate is issued in 72 hours