

## Ask Irene

### Advice for the Entrepreneur

by Irene Hurst

• Director

USF Small Business Development Center

[www.sbdc.usf.edu](http://www.sbdc.usf.edu)

[hurst@coba.usf.edu](mailto:hurst@coba.usf.edu)



**Q.** *What potential benefits are available to women-owned businesses?*

**A.** Government agencies and major corporations have goals to promote women business enterprises (WBE) by buying from them. The goal is not a mandate and it is not enforceable; it is a part of their performance goals. Everything being equal and if they have not met their goal for WBE procurement, then you have an advantage as a WBE.

To be recognized as a WBE, you need to obtain certification from government agencies at every level and/or from several national organizations, like National Women Business Owners Corporation ([NWBOC.org](http://NWBOC.org)) and Women's Business Enterprise National Council ([WBENC.org](http://WBENC.org)). The State of Florida certification for WBEs is available at <http://osd.dms.state.fl.us>.

Each agency has its own eligibility criteria. Usually these include majority ownership, controlled and managed by women, limit on net worth, size of business and management structure.

Other federal certifications that WBEs may apply for are 8 Business Development program ([www.sba.gov/8abd](http://www.sba.gov/8abd)), Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB) ([www.sba.gov/sdb](http://www.sba.gov/sdb)) and Historically Underutilized Business Zone (HUBZone) ([www.sba.gov/hubzone](http://www.sba.gov/hubzone)) certifications. SDB and HubZone are available to all small businesses regardless of ownership gender or race.

Being a certified business usually opens doors to meet with potential buyers at government agencies and corporations who care about diversity in their procurement. Being certified does not provide an automatic open market. You still need to target and sell to your market.

There are steps you can take to maximize your status as being a certified WBE. First, complete vendor applications with all of the agencies you want to target. Contact the Small Business Liaison Offices or the Supplier Diversity Manager to set up a meeting either with them or the end users in their companies. Continually check their Web sites for upcoming bids. Take advantage of every networking opportunity to remind them of your business, and follow up after each meeting. Register your company with Central Contractor Registration at [www.ccr.gov](http://www.ccr.gov).

The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at USF offers a free workshop on this topic; please check <http://sbdc.usf.edu> for the seminar schedule. Also, for an opportunity to network with other women business owners, the SBDC is sponsoring, along with MADDUX BUSINESS REPORT and others, the Women Business Owners Leadership Conference on October 27. For more information, go to the SBDC Web site. 