THE CAWBO FACT SHEET

Office of Federal Contract Assistance for Women Business Owners (CAWBO)

NEW OFFICE ESTABLISHED

The Office of Federal Contract Assistance for Women Business Owners (CAWBO) was established October 1, 2000, in the Office of Government Contracting at the U.S. Small Business Administration. The purpose of the office is to increase federal contracting opportunities for women-owned small business (WOSB) and to increase the number of WOSB that successfully compete in the federal marketplace.

NEW LEGISLATION ENACTED

In December 2000, the office was given responsibility for the Women-Owned Small Business Federal Contract Assistance Program as part of SBA's Reauthorization Act (Public Law 106-554). This legislation has been incorporated into the Small Business Act, 15 U.S. C. S 637(m). The new program allows federal agencies to "restrict competition" when they solicit supplies or services in industries where WOSB are underrepresented, if two or more WOSB are expected to compete and the government expects to be able to make an award at a fair and reasonable price. Such contracts cannot exceed $3 million for services or $5 million in manufacturing.

WHY THIS NEW PROGRAM IS IMPORTANT

In 1994, Congress enacted the Federal Acquisition and Streamlining Act (FASA) that, among other things, set a goal of 5 percent of federal contract dollars to be awarded to WOSB. This goal has never been achieved. In fact, the amount of federal contract dollars awarded to WOSB has never exceeded 2.5 percent. FASA did not establish any specific means by which the 5 percent could be achieved and it did not specify how the goal would be accounted to prime and subcontracting. Given the need for clarification and more action to reach at least 5 percent, Congress established this program as a tool the agencies may use to help achieve this goal.

In FY 2000, WOSB won $4.6 billion of the federal procurement dollars. During this time federal procurement grew nearly 8 percent, but contract dollars to WOSB were approximately the same as in FY 1999. Therefore, the percent awarded to WOSB fell to 2.3 percent from 2.5 percent.

CAWBO'S ROLE IN IMPLEMENTING THE NEW PROGRAM

Before agencies can use the program, industries in which WOSB have been underrepresented must be identified. CAWBO is leading the efforts to complete a study and will publish the list of eligible industries when the research is completed. As part of the implementation effort, changes to the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) and the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) will include definitions of "economically disadvantaged," "underrepresented," and "substantially underrepresented," and will specify the process for certification, waivers, etc. CAWBO expects to complete the implementation by the end of 2001.

CAWBO will work closely with the major procuring agencies, especially those that have not yet achieved the 5 percent goal, to open up more contracting opportunities to WOSB using this new program. The office is also reaching out to WOSB and organizations to raise awareness about this new contracting vehicle and environment. The program does not waive federal agencies' responsibility to award contracts to qualified firms at reasonable prices. CAWBO is also working to improve procurement training and practice. Mentor-

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protégé programs, teaming, and subcontracting have been used successfully by small firms to gain experience and past performance records. CAWBO is increasing attention and efforts regarding these and other methods to help more WOSB become qualified, successful contractors.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO ASSIST WOSB IN FEDERAL PROCUREMENT

While it is not necessary to be certified to participate in federal contracting, it is a requirement to participate in certain special procurement programs. SBA has several procurement assistance programs that eligible WOSB are encouraged to use. They are HUBZone, 8(a), and Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB). Information about applicable criteria and procedures can be found on the website of each program. They are:

http://www. sba.gov/med sba.gov/sdb sba.gov/hubzone

SBA also has 70 District Offices, over 900 Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), approximately 90 Women's Business Centers (WBC) and six Area (procurement) Offices with a staff of experienced procurement specialists. For a complete list and the resources nearest you, go to www.sba.gov and search for programs and offices. Procurement assistance is available at www.sba.gov/gc.

All WOSB are encouraged to register in PRO-Net. It is an on-line data base that is searched by contracting officers and prime contractors to locate firms in particular industries and locations, often by type of ownership, e.g., WOSB. It is an excellent marketing tool for WOSB to gain instant and wide exposure to the federal contracting community. A firm can self-certify that it is small and that it is women-owned (meaning that at least 51 percent of the ownership and control is by women). A firm can also provide information about the services or supplies it provides plus a listing of awards or other favorable past performance information.

In addition, all WOSB seeking contracts or subcontracts are encouraged to search www.WomenBiz.gov which has over 100 links to procurement information. The website also has sections on Getting Started, Subcontracting, Agency Forecasting, and Mentor-Protégé Programs. It also includes contacts with the Small Disadvantaged Business Utilization Offices, the Women Business Advocates, the On-Line Women's Business Center and SBA's Procurement Center Representatives.