



## Certification

Content from Lisa Rehurek's book, *THE RFP SUCCESS™ BOOK*, Certification Chapter

Consumers have a plethora of choices when selecting a service or product provider, so a differentiated marketing strategy is a key to business success. One vital way to differentiate yourself from the pack is by certifying your woman-, minority- LGBT- Veteran – or Disabled owned company as a business that meets the exact criteria of key certifying organizations. You can reap many rewards through this certification by contracting or partnering on projects with other certified businesses, and by becoming a potential bidder on corporate and public agency contracts.

Certification gives diverse owned businesses opportunities to become part of corporate and governmental supply chains. Given the rapidly changing demographic of the United States, Corporate America is seeking ways in which to have its employee and supplier base reflect the population. Diverse owned businesses are often more cost-effective and offer an expanded customer base and market share for the corporations who contract with them. Diversity-owned businesses tend to have greater access to emerging markets and make outstanding contributions to the economic viability of the communities in which they are located. Certification is one means in which Corporate America has chosen to achieve these goals.

There are an abundance of certification options, and it is important to be sure to choose the certification that will most benefit your company. For the purposes of this section I am going to focus on the certifications that the Fortune 1000 community prefer.

Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) certifies woman business enterprises (WBE) National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC) certifies minority business enterprises (MBE) National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC) certifies LGBT business enterprises (LGBTBE) US Business Leadership Network (USBLN) certifies disabled business enterprises and service disabled veteran owned businesses (DOBE, V-DOB and SDV-DOBE)

National Veteran Business Development Council (NVBDC) certifies veteran and service disabled owned veteran business enterprises (VOBE and SDVOBE)

These are what I refer to as the Big 5.

Certification for all 5 organizations has 3 main requirements:

1. Ownership. Is the company owned 51% or more by 1 or more people of the diversity demographic being certified?
2. Operation. Are the diversity people for which the certification relies upon involved in the day to day operation and does one or more hold the highest-ranking title.
3. Control. Does the diverse person/people have ultimate control of the company as stated in the company's governing documents?

Now before you get any funny ideas about trying to trick the system...DON'T! The big 5 certification organizations have gone to great lengths to weed out any ineligible companies and companies thinking they will simply change the ownership paperwork! They are smart and your name and reputation can be tarnished should you attempt such deception.

However, if your company is eligible it can be a fantastic marketing tool and differentiator that can be the piece that tips the scales in your favor in an RFP or bid process.