

The USBLN[®]
Disability Supplier Diversity Program[®]
Business Opportunities Toolkit



WHAT IS THE DISABILITY SUPPLIER DIVERSITY PROGRAM®?

The US Business Leadership Network® Disability Supplier Diversity Program® (USBLN® DSDP®) offers businesses that are owned by an individual(s) with a disability, including service disabled veterans, an exciting opportunity to increase their access to potential contracting opportunities with major corporations, government agencies, and one another. Through the USBLN® DSDP®, your business can obtain Disability-Owned Business Enterprise Certification and get connected to a nationwide network of corporate and government procurement professionals, disability advocates, and other certified disability-owned businesses.

WHY GET CERTIFIED?

The benefits of obtaining Disability-Owned Business Enterprise Certification are numerous. Benefits include:

- **Be at the right place at the right time.** Disability-Owned Business Enterprise Certification provides your company with the opportunity to register as a certified diverse vendor in corporate supplier diversity databases. These databases are the first destinations corporate procurement representatives visit when looking for potential vendors for a contract opportunity. Certification also enters you into the USBLN® DSDP® database of certified suppliers, which is another important resource that leads USBLN® DSDP® Corporate Partners to potential vendors. Additionally, certified disability-owned businesses are able to attend USBLN® and corporate matchmaking and educational events designed specifically for certified businesses.
- **Access to Contracting Opportunities.** Certification is a credential that opens doors and grants access to supplier diversity advocates within corporations and government entities. Supplier diversity advocates assist businesses that have obtained a diversity certification in assessing the availability of opportunities within the organization and often make key introductions for businesses that are a good fit for their purchasing needs. Additionally, many corporations have mentorship, leadership, and educational programs specifically for certified businesses.
- **Differentiate your business from your competition.** In a corporate procurement process, if two companies are offering a similar product at a similar price, holding a certification will make your business the better candidate for the opportunity. Branding your company as Disability-Owned Business Enterprise-Certified can be the favorable difference-maker between you and your closest competition.
- **Major corporations and government entities value certification.** The USBLN® DSDP® Corporate Partners have made a commitment to diversity in their procurement practices and desire to include disability-owned businesses in their supply chain. Corporate Partners trust that a business holding the Disability-Owned Business Enterprise Certification is authentically owned by an individual or individual(s) with a disability due to the corporation's relationship with and involvement in the USBLN® Disability Supplier Diversity Program®.

- **Connect with collaborative partners.** Certification connects you to a network of other businesses that have obtained Disability-Owned Business Enterprise Certification. This connection to other disability-owned businesses is an avenue to partners for collaboration and strategic alliances. By purchasing from and selling to other businesses that have been certified, you strengthen the economic power of the community of people with disabilities.
- **Certification is a mark of pedigree.** Obtaining certification takes time and discipline. As a result, certification is an indication that your business conducts itself professionally and is able to meet the high expectations and standards of the certification.
- **Be part of the movement.** The USBLN® does important advocacy and research on behalf of professionals and entrepreneurs with disabilities. By becoming certified, your business becomes a part of a growing movement that demonstrates the economic power of individuals with disabilities.

DOES MY BUSINESS QUALIFY FOR CERTIFICATION?

The Disability-Owned Business Enterprise Certification is modeled after the certifications offered by the National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC), the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC), and the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC) for minority-, women-, and LGBT-owned businesses, respectively. To be eligible for Disability-Owned Business Enterprise certification, a business must:

- Be at least fifty-one percent (51%) owned, operated, managed, and controlled by individual(s) with a disability or service-disabled veteran(s) who are either U.S. citizen(s) or lawful permanent resident(s)
- Exercise independence from any other business enterprise
- Have its principal place of business (headquarters) in the United States
- Have been formed as a legal entity in the United States

The USBLN® DSDP® defines disability as a physical and/or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of an individual, and can be demonstrated by appropriate documentation. The USBLN® definition of disability includes service-disabled veterans.

HOW DO I GET CERTIFIED?

Visit the USBLN® website at www.usbln.org. On our site, you can access the DSDP® application and begin the certification process. After you fill out the application, collect the required documentation, and submit the materials to the USBLN®, you will be contacted if any materials are missing. Then, your application undergoes initial review by a USBLN® Certification Committee. After your initial review, you will be contacted to set up your site visit. Once your site visit is complete, your application undergoes final committee review, and the decision is made. Once certified, work with the USBLN® and its DSDP® Corporate Partners to seek out new opportunities for your business!

HOW DO I KNOW CERTIFICATION IS RIGHT FOR MY BUSINESS?

There are several different questions you should consider before initiating the certification process. Good questions to ask include:

- **Does your business meet the requirements for ownership and operation by one or more persons with disabilities?** Review the requirements and definitions carefully to help ensure a positive certification outcome. The Certification Committees consider all evidence presented in an application when making a certification decision, so one “negative” answer does not necessarily make your business ineligible. If you have questions regarding specific criteria, please contact the USBLN®.
- **Does your company have the capacity to fill large contracts while maintaining quality?** Corporations and government agencies expect their suppliers to maintain high standards of quality while meeting project specifications, often on a very large scale. Having flexible production and staffing capacity is a common requirement for many corporate opportunities. If your company is small, consider the possibility of building strategic alliances with other businesses that have obtained Disability-Owned Business Enterprise Certification before going after large corporate contracts.
- **Are you willing to share detailed information about your company, including financial and governance documentation, with a third-party agency?** The USBLN® places a high priority on maintaining the confidentiality of your documents. In order to identify your eligibility for certification, the USBLN® Certification Committees require detailed information about your business. To serve on a Certification Committee, committee members must sign a nondisclosure agreement and are expected to follow strict ethical standards. If you are unwilling to furnish all requested documentation, your business may be denied certification.
- **Are you prepared to incorporate the certification into a multi-pronged, long-term strategy for new business development?** Understanding that certification is not a guarantee for or entitlement to a contract is critical to being successful in using your certification. In order to win new business with your certification, you must research appropriate opportunities within corporations, build relationships with procurement representatives, and be patient. There are many opportunities, but there are also many businesses competing for each one. Certification may get your business in the door, but strong research, relationships, and internal practices are necessary to seal the deal.

HOW DO I LEARN MORE?

You may visit the USBLN® website at www.usbln.org. Additionally, you can email Patricia@usbln.org or call (713) 304-8950 for additional information on certification through the USBLN® Disability Supplier Diversity Program®.