

US Business Leadership Network®  
Disability Supplier Diversity Program<sup>SM</sup>  
1501 M Street NW, Seventh Floor  
Washington, DC 20005



## [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

### **What is the USBLN®?**

The United States Business Leadership Network® (USBLN®) believes in a workplace, marketplace, and supply chain where people with disabilities are fully respected for their talents, economic self-sufficiency, and entrepreneurial spirit. There are over 65 BLN affiliates in 36 states and Canada, representing more than 5,000 employers across the US. Through its network, the USBLN® promotes the economic advantages of employing and marketing to people with disabilities and purchasing from disability-owned businesses.

### **What is the USBLN® Disability Supplier Diversity Program<sup>SM</sup> (DSDP)?**

The USBLN® DSDP is a certification program for businesses owned by individual(s) with disabilities. Businesses that obtain Disability-Owned Business Enterprise Certification are eligible for increased contracting opportunities with USBLN® DSDP Corporate Partners.

### **What is Disability-Owned Business Enterprise Certification?**

Disability-Owned Business Enterprise Certification is obtained through a company's participation in the USBLN® Disability Supplier Diversity Program. Businesses that have obtained Disability-Owned Business Enterprise Certification have demonstrated that they are at least 51% owned, operated, managed, and controlled by individual(s) with a disability who are U.S citizens or lawful permanent residents.

### **What are the benefits of certification?**

Once certified, your business will become part of the USBLN® database of businesses that have obtained Disability-Owned Business Enterprise Certification, which is used by major corporations seeking diverse vendors. Certification as a disability-owned business provides networking opportunities with other certified disability-owned businesses. Additionally, certification gives you the ability to brand your business as certified, which indicates your company has undergone an in-depth independent verification of its disability-ownership status.

## Who are USBLN® Disability Supplier Diversity Program Corporate Partners?

USBLN® DSDP Corporate Partners are major corporations who actively participate with the USBLN® in seeking certified disability-owned businesses for contracting opportunities. The list of USBLN® DSDP Corporate Partners is growing steadily. For a complete list of current USBLN® DSDP Corporate Partners, please visit [www.usbln.org](http://www.usbln.org).

## What are the criteria for certification?

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 non-disability-owned business enterprise
- Have its principal place of business (headquarters) in the United States
- Have been formed as a legal entity in the United States

## How is disability defined?

Disability is defined as a physical and/or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual, and can be demonstrated by appropriate documentation (*e.g.*, records, statements, or other appropriate information) issued from a licensed, registered or certified vocational rehabilitation specialist (*i.e.*, State or private); any Federal agency, State agency, or an agency of the District of Columbia or a U.S. territory that issues or provides disability benefits; or from a licensed medical professional (*e.g.*, a physician or other medical professional duly certified by a State, the District of Columbia, or a U.S. territory, to practice medicine) that state that the individual is a person with a disability.

## Who qualifies as a Service-Disabled Veteran?

A Service-Disabled Veteran is a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable, and whose disability was incurred or aggravated in line of duty in the active military, naval, or air service. To be considered a Service-Disabled Veteran, the veteran must have an adjudication letter from the Veterans Administration (VA), a Department of Defense Form 214 (Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty), or a Statement of Service from the National Archives and Records Administration, stating that the veteran has a service-connected disability.

## What types of businesses are eligible for Disability-Owned Business Enterprise Certification?

Businesses organized as sole proprietorships, LLCs, LLPs, Partnerships, Corporations, and S-Corporations are eligible for certification. Non-profit organizations are not eligible for certification. Certain types of franchises, brokerages, dealerships, and manufacturers' representatives are not eligible for certification.

### **Is a business eligible for certification if it is jointly owned by an individual with a disability and an individual without a disability?**

Yes. If a business has majority (51%) ownership by individual(s) with a disability and the majority ownership has management and control of the company, and commensurate contribution of capital and assumption of risk, the business may be eligible for certification. Additionally, the ownership that is not individual(s) with a disability must not be able to restrict the majority ownership.

### **What does the certification process entail?**

Certification begins with a business owner making an informed decision that certification is a good fit for their business. Once a business owner decides to initiate the certification process, the certification application must be completed. The completed certification application, along with the required supporting documentation, must then be submitted to the USBLN®. Once a completed application is received, the business will then undergo initial review by a certification committee and then a site visit is scheduled. After completion of the site visit, a final review and vote on the application is completed by the certification committee. At that time, a determination is made about the eligibility of the applicant business for certification, and the decision is provided to the business owner within 10-15 business days.

### **How long does the certification process take?**

Once a complete certification application is received, the process for its review typically takes between 60 and 90 days.

### **What is a USBLN® certification committee?**

A USBLN® certification committee is a body comprised of corporate representatives, financial and legal expertise, and representatives from certified disability-owned businesses. The committee reviews applications for certification, and offers recommendations of an applicant's eligibility for certification. These committee members are trained in accordance with the USBLN® DSDP Standards & Procedures, sign nondisclosure agreements, and are required to recuse themselves from review and discussion of an application if they have knowledge of an applicant as a supplier, customer, or competitor.

### **What documentation is required for certification?**

Certification requires the submission of a completed application form and required supporting documentation. Supporting documentation includes financial and governance documentation of the business, general business information, disability status qualifiers, signed sworn affidavit, and payment.

### **Why do you need financial and governance documentation regarding my business?**

Certification as a disability-owned business is not a statement of the financial viability of the business. However, the financial and governance documents of a business provide crucial insight into the ownership, management, control, and independence of an applicant business entity. These documents provide valuable perspective into the operations of the company and its eligibility for certification.

### **Do you disclose the nature of my disability to anyone, including USBLN® DSDP Corporate Partners?**

If the USBLN® learns the nature or extent of your disability through the documentation presented in a certification application and/or through conversations with you and/or your representatives, it will not be disclosed to anyone, including USBLN® DSDP Corporate Partners. Disability-Owned Business Enterprise Certification indicates to USBLN® Corporate Partners that the company is in fact owned by individual(s) with a disability, but the nature and extent of the disability is not disclosed. The only information regarding disability status that may be disclosed is if the business qualifies as a service-disabled veteran-owned business.

### **What steps are taken to ensure the confidentiality of my documentation?**

Information security is an essential component of the USBLN® DSDP. All documents are kept locked in a secure office. Access to files is restricted to a limited number of staff that prepares files for committee review and handles requests from applicant businesses. All members of USBLN® staff and USBLN® certification committees are required to sign the USBLN® nondisclosure agreement. Additionally, any committee members with knowledge of your business as a supplier, customer, or competitor are required to recuse themselves from the review and discussion of your application.

### **What is a site visit? Do I have to pay for it?**

During a site visit, a representative of the USBLN® will visit the primary place of business of the applicant. The site visitor will conduct an interview with the owner(s) with a disability, and will require a tour of the business premises. A site visit usually lasts 60-90 minutes, and is designed to provide additional insight into the day-to-day operations of the business. There are no surprise site visits. The site visit is included in the payment of the processing fee. However, if a site visit needs to be cancelled/rescheduled due to the schedule/lack of preparation of the business owner(s)/principal(s), an additional fee may be incurred which must be paid by the applicant business before a determination of eligibility for certification will be issued.

### **How often are site visits required?**

Site visits are required upon initial certification and at a minimum of every third year with recertification. The USBLN® reserves the right to conduct site visits on a more frequent basis if requested by a certification committee. There are no surprise site visits.

### **How long does certification last?**

Certification is valid for one year. Recertification is required on an annual basis, and is a simplified version of the initial certification process.

### **Is there an application fee for certification and recertification?**

There is a \$200 processing fee for initial certification. Recertification is an annual process with an associated \$200 fee.

### **If I am denied certification can I appeal the decision?**

If you are denied certification, you may appeal the decision by following the guidelines detailed in the USBLN® DSDP Standards & Procedures. The denial letter will include additional instructions.

### **Once I am certified, how much of my application is made available to corporations?**

Corporate Partners of the USBLN® can access your company's name, location, business functions, and commodity codes. Contact information for the owner and contact listed on the application, the year the business was established/acquired, state of formation, number of employees, gross annual revenues, security clearances, bonding capacity, and transportation operating status are also available to corporations. The certified disability-owned business must provide either oral or written consent to the USBLN® before it will release additional information to a Corporate Partner.

### **Once I am certified, how much of my application is made available to other certified disability-owned businesses?**

The information available to other certified disability-owned businesses is: your company name, company location, business functions, commodity codes, and contact information for the owner and company contact listed on the application.

### **If I receive certification, what do I do next?**

When you receive your certification, you should follow the steps detailed in your Disability-Owned Business Enterprise – Certified Toolkit to get registered with the databases of appropriate USBLN® Corporate Partners. Additionally, you should incorporate the USBLN® Certified logo into your marketing materials. You also may want to contact other disability-owned businesses to seek out B2B opportunities. It is also recommended you attend USBLN® DSDP events to meet face-to-face with both corporate representatives and other certified disability-owned businesses.

### **How do I get recertified?**

You will receive a notice regarding recertification 90 days before your certification is set to expire. The recertification process requires you to update your company's information if it has changed, and submit documentation of any ownership and management changes. Financial information is required annually, as well as an updated disability status qualifier. Site visits are required at a minimum of every third year.

### **Where can I learn more?**

Please contact the USBLN® at [info@usbln.org](mailto:info@usbln.org) to learn more about the USBLN® Disability Supplier Diversity Program.