Getting your small business certification can potentially open doors for your enterprise. Business certifications are an important distinction that signals your competitive advantage. In addition, the government and large corporate businesses look to certifications to confidently source from a diverse supplier network. Certification can also help your business access funding and contact opportunities tied to a specific certification.

The Benefits of Certification

Getting certified enables your business to:

- Compete and win federal contracts
- Qualify for exclusive contracts
- Receive mentoring and technical assistance

Federal Certification Programs

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and other federal agencies have a number of programs to help small businesses compete for federal contracts. Certification can unlock contracts with the federal government, which is the largest buyer of products and services in the U.S.

Federal programs aimed at helping small businesses win contracts include the following:

**The 8(a) Business Development Program**

This SBA program is designed for firms 51% or more owned and controlled by one or more socially and economically disadvantaged persons. The federal government awards about 10% of all federal contracts to socially and economically disadvantaged businesses (SDBs) annually. The 8(a) program typically requires revenues exceeding $10 million annually.

**Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) Federal Contract Program**

This SBA program offers contracts for WOSBs in industries where firms are underrepresented. WOSBs are firms that are at least 51% owned and controlled by women. The federal government awards at least 5% of all contracts to WOSBs annually. WOSBs may also qualify as economically disadvantaged (EDWOSB).
Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) Program
This U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) program is intended for businesses with at least 51% owned and controlled by service-disabled veterans. The federal government awards SDVOSB certifications to businesses with one or more service-disabled veterans managing day-to-day operations. The federal government awards at least 3% of all contracts to SDVOSBs annually.

Historically Underutilized Business Zone (HUBZone) program
The SBA HUBZone program awards contracts to small businesses in economically distressed communities.

SBA Mentor-Protégé program (MPP)
The MPP program is designed for a business mentor and protégé to jointly apply for contracts.

Third-Party Certification Programs
In addition to the federal government, there are several third-party organizations that certify small businesses. These organizations provide training, technical assistance, and mentoring for businesses that complete their certification process. Many corporations source diverse suppliers from third-party certification databases. Below are examples of organizations that provide certifications to the minority small business community.

Minority-Owned Business Certification
The National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC) advances business opportunities for certified minority enterprises and connects them to corporate members. NMSDC offers the minority business enterprise (MBE) certification to businesses that are at least 51% minority-owned, managed, and controlled.

Women-Owned Business Certification
The Women’s Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) is a leading nonprofit organization dedicated to helping women-owned businesses thrive. WBENC provides certification for small businesses and is an approved third-party certifier for the WOSB program. Eligible businesses must be at least 51% owned, controlled, operated, and managed by women.

Disability-Owned Business Certification
Disability:IN is a national nonprofit that works to promote the full inclusion of people with disabilities, to inspire accessible innovation for all, and to foster cultures of inclusion. Disability:IN offers a disability-owned business enterprises (DOBE) certification for businesses 51% owned, controlled, operated, and managed by a person(s) with a disability. Additionally, they offer a Veteran Disability-Owned Business Enterprises (V-DOBE) and a Service-Disabled Veteran Disability-Owned Business Enterprises (SDV-DOBE) certification for businesses 51% owned by a disabled veteran.
LGBT-Owned Business Certification

The National LGBT Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC) is the business voice of the LGBT community and is the largest global not-for-profit advocacy organization specifically dedicated to expanding economic opportunities and advancement for LGBT people. NGLCC offers the LGBT Business Enterprise (LGBTBE) Certification for businesses 51% owned, operated, managed, and controlled by an LGBT person.

Your Next Steps

Regardless of whether you apply through a federal program or a third-party organization, the process of obtaining certification is similar.

1. **Determine Eligibility**
   
   Each certification process has a unique set of eligibility requirements. Review these requirements to determine if your business is eligible. Many certifying bodies have assistance if you have further questions on whether your business qualifies.

2. **Gather Relevant Documents**
   
   Every certification process requires you to provide documentation of your business and its finances. Before starting the application process, collect all relevant and required documents to streamline the application process.

3. **Share Your Story Through the Application**
   
   Many applications require small businesses to provide a narrative to accompany their application. This is an opportunity to share your story and talk about how this certification program benefits your business.

A certification can help your business gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace. These certifications are designed to expand opportunities for disadvantaged businesses and introduce new suppliers into the contracting marketplace.