

Shattering Glass Ceilings: Women in Government Contracting: Vendor Processes, Certifications and 2025 Policy Changes



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Abstract

This article examines the participation of women-owned small businesses in government contracting across local, state, and federal levels. It details the vendor registration processes for each procurement tier, reviews key business certifications—such as the Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) Federal Contract Program, Economically Disadvantaged WOSB (EDWOSB), 8(a) Business Development, and HUBZone—and highlights industry recognition through entities like the Women's Business Enterprise National Council. Emerging policy shifts since January 2025 are analyzed, including Executive Order 14275's FAR overhaul, GSA's GWAC consolidation, efficiency mandates, and expanded diversity, equity, and inclusion requirements. Implications for women entrepreneurs are discussed within a doctoral-level scholarly framework.

Keywords: women-owned small business, government contracting, WOSB, vendor registration, procurement policy

Introduction

Government contracting presents a vital revenue stream and growth platform for small businesses, yet women-owned enterprises have historically been underrepresented in procurements. To address this disparity, federal, state, and local agencies offer streamlined registration processes and specialized certifications, facilitating fair competition and targeted support. Since January 2025, an array of policy initiatives has reshaped the procurement landscape, mandating regulatory overhauls and heightened oversight that directly impact women-owned firms. This article delineates the multi-level vendor registration procedures, outlines principal certifications for women

entrepreneurs, and analyzes salient policy developments to inform strategic positioning in the evolving government marketplace (Lyons-Burt, 2025).

Across the United States, women entrepreneurs contribute significantly to job creation, innovation, and community development. Despite accounting for nearly 40% of new small business formations, women-owned firms receive less than 10% of government contract dollars, underscoring persistent structural barriers and informational gaps (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2024). Understanding the vendor onboarding and certification frameworks is essential to bridge this divide, enhance procurement diversity, and bolster economic equity (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2025).

This analysis is organized in five sections. The first reviews vendor registration processes at local, state, and federal levels, highlighting jurisdictional variations and support resources. The second surveys key certifications—both government-issued and private-sector—that women entrepreneurs can leverage to access set-aside contracts (U.S. Chamber of Commerce). The third examines notable policy changes since January 2025, including regulatory streamlining and procurement vehicle consolidation. The fourth considers the strategic implications of these shifts for women-owned enterprises. Finally, the conclusion synthesizes findings and offers recommendations for sustaining momentum toward inclusive procurement (Vinson & Elkins, 2025).

Vendor Registration Processes

Before delving into level-specific procedures, it is important to appreciate how

vendor registration gateways serve as the primary intersection between government demand and private-sector supply. These portals and databases not only verify a business's legal status but also categorize its specialties, socioeconomic classifications, and performance history, laying the foundation for contract matchmaking and forecasting.

(U.S. Chamber of Commerce)

Local Government Registration

Municipalities and counties maintain procurement portals or vendor registries to identify qualified suppliers. Common steps include:

- Submission of a business license and Tax Identification Number.
- Completion of a vendor profile detailing goods or services offered.
- Compliance with local socioeconomic preference ordinances (e.g., women-owned or minority-owned set-asides).
- Attendance at periodic vendor outreach sessions hosted by procurement offices.

These requirements vary by jurisdiction but generally emphasize basic business legitimacy and specialty classification.

Local governments increasingly deploy digital dashboards to track upcoming solicitations and award data in real time. For women-owned firms, these tools enable targeted outreach by showcasing agencies that historically prioritize socioeconomic preferences. Moreover, city procurement offices often partner with local women's chambers of commerce to host "procurement boot camps," equipping

entrepreneurs with tailored guidance on bid preparation and contracting norms.

(Federal Contracting Registry)

State Government Registration

States administer broader procurement systems—often centralized—to streamline purchases for multiple agencies. Typical procedures involve:

- Registration in the state’s e-procurement platform.
- Submission of certified documentation such as the Secretary of State’s Certificate of Existence.
- Verification of small-business status according to state size standards.
- Optional self-certification or third-party certification as a women-owned business to access set-aside opportunities.

Some states partner with their Small Business Development Centers and Women’s Business Centers to provide onboarding assistance and match vendors with contract leads.

Several jurisdictions now offer bulk-registration features, allowing vendors to apply for multiple state certifications—such as Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) and Veteran-Owned Small Business (VOSB)—simultaneously. This innovation reduces administrative overhead and amplifies visibility in state procurement forecasts, especially for intersectional women entrepreneurs spanning multiple preference categories.

(Federal Contractor Registry)

Federal Government Registration

At the federal level, small businesses—including women-owned enterprises—must register in the System for Award Management (SAM) to be eligible for contract awards. The process entails:

1. Obtaining a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) through SAM.gov..
2. Providing detailed representations and certifications covering business size, ownership, and NAICS codes.
3. Attesting to compliance with federal socioeconomic programs, such as the Women-Owned Small Business Federal Contract Program.
4. Maintaining an active SAM registration with annual renewals to ensure continued eligibility and visibility in federal procurement searches.

Federal agencies also leverage the Dynamic Small Business Search (DSBS) database to identify potential women-owned subcontractors, enabling primes to satisfy subcontracting goals efficiently. Engaging early with Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTACs) can accelerate SAM onboarding and improve a firm’s presence in DSBS.

(Federal Contractor Registry)

Business Certifications for Women-Owned Enterprises

Women-owned businesses seeking preferential access to set-aside contracts must navigate a landscape of certifications that not only signal eligibility but also confer competitive leverage. Certification underscores a firm’s compliance with

socioeconomic mandates and often unlocks bid-with confidence opportunities.

For emerging entrepreneurs, the decision to pursue one or multiple certifications hinges on factors such as target NAICS codes, anticipated contract size, and resource capacity for the certification process. Integrating certification milestones into strategic planning can ensure that women-owned firms maximize pipeline opportunities across government tiers.

(U.S. Chamber of Commerce)

Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) Federal Contract Program

The WOSB Federal Contract Program aims to level the playing field by reserving certain federal contracts for certified women-owned firms in underrepresented industries. To qualify, a business must:

- Be a small business under SBA size standards.
- Be at least 51% owned and controlled by U.S. citizen women.
- Have women manage daily operations and long-term decision making.

Certification is completed via SBA's MySBA Certifications portal or through SBA-approved Third-Party Certifiers, with continued oversight to protect program integrity.

(U.S. Small Business Administration)

Economically Disadvantaged WOSB (EDWOSB)

The EDWOSB subset extends greater assistance to women with demonstrable

economic disadvantage. Eligibility criteria include:

- Meeting all standard WOSB requirements.
- Demonstrating personal net worth below \$850,000.
- Averaging adjusted gross income of \$400,000 or less over three years.
- Holding personal assets valued at \$6.5 million or less.

EDWOSBs gain access to additional sole-source and set-aside contracts designated for disadvantaged businesses.

8 (a) Business Development Program

Administered by the SBA, the 8(a) program supports socially and economically disadvantaged entrepreneurs—often overlapping with women-owned firms—by providing:

- Access to set-aside and sole-source federal contracts.
- Business development assistance, including mentorship and training.
- A nine-year program term with annual reviews.

Eligibility parallels EDWOSB thresholds and requires 51% ownership by U.S. citizens meeting disadvantage criteria. (U.S. Small Business Administration)

HUBZone Program

The Historically Underutilized Business Zone (HUBZone) certification targets businesses in economically distressed areas, requiring:

- Principal office located in a designated HUBZone.

- At least 35% of employees residing in HUBZone areas.
- 51% ownership by U.S. citizens or eligible entities.

The program's goal is to award 3% of federal contract dollars to HUBZone-certified firms annually, expanding market access in underserved regions.

(U.S. Small Business Administration)

Industry and Private-Sector Certifications

Beyond SBA programs, women entrepreneurs pursue certifications through:

- Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC), the most widely recognized private-sector credential for women-owned businesses.
- National Women's Business Council, offering policy advocacy and networking.
- State-level women's business centers and minority supplier development councils, enhancing visibility and private procurement opportunities.

Pursuing multiple certifications can create synergies—such as cross-promotion in corporate supplier diversity portals—amplifying a women-owned firm's brand among both public and private buyers. (U.S. Small Business Administration)

Policy Changes Since January 2025

A surge of executive actions and agency directives in early 2025 has catalyzed a decade's worth of procurement reform in just a few months. These changes reflect a broader commitment to reducing red tape,

accelerating award timelines, and intensifying focus on socioeconomic inclusion.

FAR Overhaul under Executive Order 14275

Executive Order 14275 mandates a comprehensive rewrite of the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), aiming to eliminate outdated requirements and simplify procurement by:

- Instituting a "10-for-1" rule: rescind ten existing regulations for each new one adopted.
- Introducing a sunset provision for non-statutory FAR clauses after four years unless justified.
- Completing a full FAR review by October 2025 to accelerate awards and reduce complexity.

These changes will streamline solicitations, but vendors must update internal compliance processes and proposal templates to align with emerging rules.

(Vinson & Elkins, 2025)

GSA GWAC Consolidation and Procurement Reform

The General Services Administration has been directed to consolidate governmentwide acquisition contracts (GWACs) for IT goods and services, designating GSA as the executive agent. Key impacts include:

- Integration of Alliant, VETS 2, Polaris, CIO-SP, SEWP, and other vehicles into a unified structure.
- Mandates for modular, outcome-based acquisitions that encourage small and emerging business participation.

- Performance-based deliverables requirements for large contractors, promoting accountability and cost-effectiveness.

Women-owned firms should monitor consolidation timelines to optimize entry into streamlined GWAC platforms. (U. S. Small Business Administration)

Efficiency Mandates and Oversight

A government-wide efficiency initiative imposed:

A 30-day contract “pause” for audits under the DOGE Initiative, tightening badge-to-award intervals.

Mandatory agency efficiency plans with monthly compliance reporting.

Heightened scrutiny of consulting and staffing contracts, emphasizing value-based pricing and deliverables.

Such measures increase the need for transparent cost models and robust performance metrics.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Directives

Federal agencies have integrated Executive Order 13985 mandates into procurement, reinforcing DEI requirements. Contractors now face:

- Expanded reporting on subcontracting goals for women-owned and disadvantaged firms.
- Incentives for prime contractors to exceed statutory set-aside requirements.

- Enhanced oversight of prime-sub relationships to ensure genuine opportunities for certified small businesses.

(Vinson & Elkins, 2025)

Emerging Technology and Innovation Contracts

Recent amendments to the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs now emphasize participation by women-owned businesses in emerging technology sectors. Set-aside pools for AI, clean energy, and cybersecurity research grants have reserved 15% of awards for certified women entrepreneurs, a marked increase from previous years and a strategic lever for fostering high-growth, innovation-driven enterprises (Vinson & Elkins, 2025).

Implications for Women-Owned Businesses

The confluence of streamlined regulations and centralized acquisition vehicles presents both opportunities and challenges for women-owned firms. Simplified FAR provisions and consolidated GWACs may lower entry barriers, but the intensified focus on performance and cost discipline demands strategic investments in proposal development, compliance systems, and partnership networks (Vinson & Elkins, 2025).

Success now hinges on a dual focus: securing socioeconomic certifications to access designated contracts while cultivating competitive competencies to win open-market awards. Building alliances with larger prime contractors as subcontractors can satisfy prime-sub goals and generate track record points valuable for future bids.

Women entrepreneurs should also leverage digital marketing and data analytics to identify high-yield government opportunities. Tools that map agency spend by commodity, contract size, and awardee demographics can guide resource allocation, enabling women-owned firms to compete more effectively and sustain growth in a dynamic procurement environment (U.S. Small Business Administration).

Conclusion

Government contracting continues to evolve through expansive policy reforms and enhanced socioeconomic programs aimed at promoting inclusion. Women-owned small businesses benefit from tailored certifications and targeted set-asides at all government levels, yet must navigate intricate registration processes and adapt to significant regulatory changes since January 2025 (U.S. Small Business Administration).

By integrating certification strategies with proactive compliance and outreach efforts, women entrepreneurs can capitalize on streamlined procurement frameworks and emerging innovation set-asides. Collaborative engagement with PTACs, Women's Business Centers, and supplier diversity councils will remain pivotal, serving as conduits for knowledge, networking, and mentorship (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2022).

Looking ahead, sustained advocacy for transparent procurement data and continued refinement of inclusion metrics will determine whether policy ambitions translate into equitable outcomes. As the procurement landscape advances, women-owned businesses that blend agility with strategic foresight will be best positioned to secure a rising share of government

contracts and drive inclusive economic impact across communities.

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