

SBA expects first contracts in new woman-owned business program by summer

Contracting officers will now be able to set aside specific contracts for woman-owned small businesses.

- By [Matthew Weigelt](#)
- Feb 01, 2011

The Small Business Administration's Women-Owned Small Business Federal Contract Program becomes official this week, opening new opportunities for those small businesses.

The program goes into effect Feb. 4, and SBA officials said today they expect the first contract awards under the program by the fourth quarter of fiscal 2011.

SBA Administrator Karen Mills said woman-owned businesses are one of the fastest growing business sectors, and are playing a key role in creating jobs and driving the U.S. economy.

"That's why providing them with all the tools necessary to compete for and win federal contracts is so important," she said in a statement. Federal contracts can help energize these companies' expansion.

Contracting officers will now be able to set aside specific contracts for woman-owned small businesses for the first time through the program, which will help agencies reach their goal of awarding 5 percent of their contracts to women, SBA said.

Agencies have struggled to meet the 5 percent goal, with woman-owned companies averaging around the 3 percent mark the past several years, despite a drop to 1 percent in 2007.

The launch of the program has faced problems through the years. The George W. Bush administration determined that women business owners were under-represented in only four industries, including kitchen cabinet-making.

In the rule revised by the Obama administration, officials identified 83 industries in which women are eligible for federal contract assistance under the new program. (Read an [unabridged list](#) of the industries.)

SBA will post the final regulations on its website Feb. 4.

SBA recommends women business owners who want to participate in federal contracting should read through the program's requirements and download the documents they need to demonstrate their eligibility for the program.

To qualify, a company must be a small business that is at least 51 percent unconditionally and directly owned and controlled by one or more women who are U.S. citizens.

About the Author

Matthew Weigelt is acquisition editor for Federal Computer Week.