

I am Beth Gloss, the managing member of UNITED MATERIALS, LLC. We are a roofing contractor in Denver, Colorado specializing in commercial roofing, particularly reroofing, roof repair and roof maintenance. We are a successful company and handle federal contracts as part of our normal business. We provide excellent value and customer service but lose out on a great deal of business due to the lack of a clear, defined women-owned business procurement program and an emphasis from Washington D.C. to fulfill guidelines previously set.

The SBA, in my experience, does nothing to encourage federal buying from women-owned business, but only existing formal set-aside programs and vehemently discourages contracting officers in a variety of agencies from attempting to purchase from women owned small businesses. The SBA, in its own words, has a program "whose mission is to level the playing field for women entrepreneurs still facing unique obstacles in the business world." The ambivalence found inside this taxpayer sponsored agency is frustrating and unconscionable.

Because there is no set-aside program for women-owners businesses in place, heavy pressure is continually applied in our construction field to purchase from contractors where a formal set-aside program is in place. This happens even when there are women-owned contractors available and eager to do the work. I have been thwarted in any attempt to encourage the government buyers to do business with my company as a woman-owned business.

I have questioned the individual buyers and purchasers with whom I have been working. They have directed me to one reason for not following through with a women-owned bid opportunity. They have one common answer, the SBA is pressuring them to use only existing formal programs. Consequently, the lack of a women-owned set-aside program is a double-edged sword. There is no way for contracting officers to reach out and set-aside competition between women-owned businesses, and there is obviously not a serious push from Washington to reach women business owners.

The attitude towards women's businesses is negative. There is no pressure coming down to the local level to outreach to women. The abundance of OTHER set-asides – without a specific program for women – makes it very difficult for women to get a fair opportunity to compete.

Following are a few of my negative experiences in dealing with the SBA and government purchasing:

- I've made 3 different trips to the local SBA office to search for information or help in obtaining federal contracts. I made these in-person visits after being frustrated in my searches online through the SBA website for guidance on obtaining federal work as a women-owned small business. I was sent from person to person only to be repeatedly told that unless I was undercapitalized and could qualify for the 8(a) program, I was beating my head against the wall.

The SBA employees all said that there wasn't time or a mechanism for them to try to meet or encourage the meeting of the "informal guidelines" of the five percent buying quota mandated by the federal government over the last twelve years. The local SBA office expressed no imperative to do business with women because there is not a formal program in place.

- We were the successful bidder on a contract for indefinite quantity roof repairs at a Denver military base. Without a women's program in place, the SBA pushed the buyer to cancel the bid and pushed them to do their purchasing within another formal program. This resulted in the purchase being bundled in with other contracts to hide their steps.

We have been told several times that this is a horrible approach because the number of layers and people involved in communications essentially take out the possibility of good emergency responses to water leaks and infiltration. This is POOR VALUE for the government because a great deal of physical damage is done to valuable real estate and property while wading through the procedures required in these bundled contracts.

- We have repeated seen how the "good old boy" politics block women contractors as contracting methods are abused to assure the women are blocked from competition.
- I have had several meetings with the Director of the "Small Business Utilization Center" at the Denver Federal Center. I have wanted to encourage buying based on a women-owned small business status. While I received courteous treatment, I have gone back to the government buyers who say that they were discouraged from pursuing a woman-owned business purchase by this office because it doesn't help meet any percentages required.

This new SBA proposal has unreasonable expectations and requirements, which are not included in other government set-aside programs. It's unrealistic and unfair to ask the Contracting Officers of federal agencies to prove which industries have discriminated against women. That statistical analysis has already been developed by the SBA itself. Several separate government-funded studies have been presented which identify over 2300 types of business that are underutilized when it comes to women.

With the workload expected of Contracting Officers it will be impossible for them to have the time or resources to do a statistical analysis of each business type for each contract. Burdening agencies with this task is ludicrous and expensive, and makes a mockery of the purported purpose of this proposal which is to encourage the federal government to expand purchasing from women-owned businesses.

Small businesses employ approximately fifty-percent of the private sector work-force. We also account for sixty- to eighty-percent of new jobs. A great deal of new technology and innovative ideas have always come from the small businesses in the United States.

We employ workers at a living wage, provide good benefits, make sure our hiring practices are fair, provide family health insurance, and continuing education. Any growth we experience will be reinvested into more jobs, more education, and especially good value provided to the government, as we have in the past.

Even though over thirty-percent of the small businesses in the United States today are owned by women, only 3.1% of federal contracting dollars go to these businesses. Providing a strong set-aside program for women-owned small businesses will increase the number of excellent, competitive contractors from which purchasing agents have the right to procure goods and services quickly and efficiently. This will increase opportunities for women business owners and help them to gain a stronger foothold into federal contracting. This makes sound economic sense and provides far better value for the government as they continue to encourage small businesses to expand and grow.