



LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN

January 31, 2014

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I. PURPOSE AND AUTHORITY

This Language Access Plan (LAP) establishes the Office of Business Opportunity's strategy for ensuring Limited English Proficiency (LEP) individuals have meaningful access to City of Houston services, programs, and activities in accordance with Executive Order 1-17¹ ("the E.O."), signed by Mayor Annise D. Parker on July 31, 2013, under the authority of Article VI, Section 7a, City Charter of the City of Houston.

The E.O. mandates all City departments to establish policies for providing essential public information about City services, programs, and activities to LEP residents and visitors. The E.O. further mandates that the City of Houston shall make available essential public information in a minimum of five (5) commonly-used languages for the City's culturally diverse population.

Two federal precedents exist with regard to the provision of language access services. As a recipient of Federal financial assistance, the City of Houston is also under the authority and guidance of the provisions of:

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which assures that no person shall on the grounds of race, color, national origin, or English proficiency be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any City of Houston program, activity, or service; whether those programs, activities and services are federally funded or not.²
- Presidential Executive Order 13166 – *Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency*. This Federal Executive Order was established to ensure improved access to federally conducted and federally assisted programs and activities for persons who, as a result of national origin, are limited in their English proficiency.³

Clarifications on Presidential Executive Order 13166 were made via memorandum issued on October 26, 2001, by former U.S. Department of Justice Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division, Ralph F. Boyd, Jr.⁴

Federal publications providing implementing guidance:

- United States Department of Justice Guidance, Enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 – National Origin Discrimination Against Persons with Limited English Proficiency, Federal Register/Vol. 65, No. 159, August 2000.⁵
- United States Department of Transportation Policy Guidance Concerning Recipients' Responsibilities to Limited English Proficiency Persons, Federal Register/Vol. 70, No. 239/December 2005.⁶

¹ Executive Order 1-17 can be found at : <http://www.houstontx.gov/execorders/1-17.html>

² An overview of Title VI of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 can be found on the U.S. Department of Justice's website at: <http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/cor/coord/titlevi.php>

³ Presidential Executive Order 13166 can be found at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2000-08-16/pdf/00-20938.pdf>.

⁴ Ralph F. Boyd, Jr. October 26, 2001 Memorandum can be found at: www.justice.gov/crt/about/cor/lep/Oct26memorandum.pdf

⁵ Federal Register/Vol. 65, No. 159, August 2000 can be found at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2000-08-16/pdf/00-20867.pdf>.

⁶ Federal Register/Vol. 70, No. 239, December 2005 can be found at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2005-12-14/pdf/05-23972.pdf>

II. DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

A. MISSION STATEMENT

The Office of Business Opportunity is committed to creating a competitive and diverse business environment in the City of Houston by promoting the growth and success of local small businesses, with special emphasis on historically underutilized groups by ensuring their meaningful participation in the government procurement process.

B. BACKGROUND AND DEPARTMENT SERVICES

The Office of Business Opportunity (OBO), formerly known as the Affirmative Action and Contract Compliance Division, was renamed and reinvigorated in 2011 in order to realize Mayor Annise Parker's vision of cultivating a competitive business environment by promoting the growth of local companies, with special emphasis on historically underserved business enterprises.

To achieve this vision, OBO connects these businesses with educational and technical resources and creates policies that strengthen their successful participation in the government procurement process. In addition to its Administrative sections, the OBO consists of four operational divisions:

Certification and Small Business Development Division

Certification

The Certification Group administers the City's Certification Program as mandated by Chapter 15, Articles V and VI, and the Federal Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Certification Program, mandated by Section 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Parts 23 and 26.

Types of Certification:

- Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) and Women Business Enterprise (WBE)
- Small Business Enterprise (SBE) *Construction Related Firms Only*
- Persons with Disability Business Enterprise (PDBE)
- Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) and Airport Concessions Business Enterprises (ACDBE)

Small Business Development

OBO collaborates with community partners to provide certified firms with services such as: business education resources, mentor protégé programs, and specialized business development services. The Business Development Manager is charged with improving the operational and financial readiness of our certified firms to help them succeed in securing goal-oriented and non-goal oriented contract opportunities. Development programs tailored to meet the specific needs of certified firms will significantly increase the number of certified companies that regularly and successfully participate in the government procurement process.

The Houston Business Solutions Center functions as an information clearinghouse for people wishing to start or operate a business in the Houston metropolitan area. Services include a variety of free Business Resource Guides, containing information on relevant permits and licenses; technical assistance; financing; the provision of business management counseling courtesy of SCORE; loan financing and loan packaging

assistance courtesy of ACCION, Texas; and the creation of business workshops and programs on a number of business-related topics.

OBO is responsible for administering the designation process for the **Hire Houston First Program**. Mayor Annise Parker developed the Hire Houston First Program in an effort to promote economic opportunity for Houston businesses and to support job creation. The City of Houston spends billions of dollars to maintain and improve the City's infrastructure, and provide services for the public. Hire Houston First grants the City the ability to give preference to local companies and local workers, as long as their pricing is competitive. The Houston Business Solutions Center staff processes applications for City Business and Local Business designations for the Hire Houston First Program.

Contract Compliance

The primary function of the Contract Compliance Division is to monitor and enforce the Prevailing Wage Rate, MWSDBE and EEO requirements on all City of Houston projects pursuant to governing City, State and Federal laws and regulations.

The Division also administers the **Pay or Play (POP) Program**. The Pay or Play Program was established on July 1, 2007 and is governed by Executive Order 1-7. The Program creates a level playing field and enhances fairness in the bid process between competing contractors that choose to offer health benefits to their workforce and those who do not. The Program also recognizes and accounts for the fact that there are costs associated with health care of the uninsured citizens of the Houston and Harris County area.

External Affairs and Outreach

The objective of the External Affairs Division is to raise awareness of the City's MWSBE Program and increase the number of eligible applicants seeking certification. The External Affairs team is responsible for developing a marketing strategy that includes the branding of the Office of Business Opportunity; producing a quarterly newsletter featuring success stories, upcoming contracting opportunities and program updates. The External Affairs team also works with existing partners including community groups, trades associations, elected officials, chambers of commerce and membership organizations to develop initiatives and partnerships that fulfill the mission, objectives and goals of OBO.

As a part of her 2013 State of the City Address, Mayor Annise D. Parker launched two new program initiatives which are administered through OBO:

TweetmyJobs Houston!

TweetMyJobs Houston! is a new, mobile platform powered by TweetMyJobs that revolutionizes recruitment by incorporating mobile and social media. TweetMyJobs Houston! is the connective thread that distributes local jobs and matches qualified job seekers with employers.

Liftoff Houston! Business Plan Competition

Liftoff Houston! is the City of Houston's first business plan competition. This entrepreneurial initiative aims to encourage Houston residents to achieve their goals of business ownership while contributing to the local growth and sustainability of the Houston economy.

III. PLAN DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

A. PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The Office of Business Opportunity (OBO) affirms its compliance with the City of Houston Mayor's Executive Order 1-17, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, and Presidential Executive Order 13166, by promoting effective communication between OBO and LEP individuals. OBO is committed to ensuring individuals with limited English proficiency have meaningful access to all City services, including OBO services, programs, and activities.

This Language Access Plan (LAP) was developed to assist OBO staff members in meeting the Department's responsibilities under the aforementioned Executive Orders and Federal Law. The LAP establishes protocol for:

- Identifying LEP individuals
- Ways in which language assistance may be provided
- Staff training
- Translations
- Interpretations
- Tracking and monitoring
- Evaluation of the LAP

B. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

1. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

OBO utilized the City of Houston's Title VI Plan and data from the City of Houston's Planning and Development Department as a standard to assess the need for appropriate language assistance.

City of Houston Title VI Plan – Developed utilizing the four-factor analysis which is a standard flexible and fact-dependent analysis that considers: 1) the number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the service, program, or activity; 2) the frequency with which LEP individuals come in contact with the service, program, or activity; 3) the nature and importance of the service, program, or activity provided by the program to people's lives; and, 4) the resources available to the service, program, or activity and the costs.⁷

City of Houston Planning & Development Department Data– Data on "Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English" were derived from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2008-2012 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year Estimates.⁸ The data includes only population 5 years and over who have the ability to speak a language. This data is collected in an effort to measure the current use of languages other than English. The ACS collects information from a large annual sample of approximately 3 million housing unit addresses and therefore provides more reliable statistics. The usefulness of the self-rated English-speaking ability question was established in the 1980s.

⁷ Language Assistance Self-Assessment and Planning Tool for Recipients of Federal Financial Assistance which discusses the Four-Factor Analysis: <http://www.lep.gov/selfassesstool.htm>

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates: <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>

2. KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Bi-Lingual Staff/Employee – An OBO or City employee/staff person who has demonstrated proficiency in English and reading, writing, speaking, and/or understanding the language of the LEP individual.

Essential Public Information – In accordance with E.O. 1-17, “Essential Public Information” is defined as any information developed or used by the department and deemed vital for purposes of public safety, public health, and economic development. This statement is used interchangeably with the term “vital documents.”

Executive Order 1-17 – Policy signed by Mayor Annise D. Parker on July 31, 2013 which mandates all City departments to establish policies for providing information about City services, programs, and activities to residents and visitors with limited English language proficiency (LEP).

Interpretation – The act of listening to a communication in one language (source language) and orally converting it to another language (target language) while retaining the same meaning.⁹

iSpeak Cards - Cards that can be used to help an LEP individual obtain interpretive services. iSpeak cards can be accessed at many online resources, including: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/civilrights/PG584.htm>.

iSpeak Houston – Official name of the City of Houston’s Language Access Program.

iSpeak Houston Coordinator - Mayor’s designee for all language access activities in the City of Houston. The Department of Neighborhood’s Office of International Communities has been appointed by Mayor Annise D. Parker as the iSpeak Houston Coordinator.

Language Access Coordinator (LAC) - Individuals designated by department directors to be responsible for devising a Language Access Plan and ensuring that the City department they represent is in compliance with E.O. 1-17. LACs are also responsible for ensuring that their department adheres to its language access policy directives, plan, and procedures to provide meaningful access to LEP persons and represent their department on the City of Houston’s Language Access Task Force.

Language Identification Flashcard – Document containing phrases in over 30 languages that can be used to help identify the language of a non-English speaker. Language identification flashcards can be accessed at many online resources, including <http://www.lep.gov/ISpeakCards2004.pdf>.

Language Line – A services that connects human interpreters via telephone to individuals who wish to speak to each other, but do not share a common language.

Limited English Proficient (LEP) Individual – A person who does not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand the English language.

Meaningful Access – Provision of language access assistance that results in accurate, timely, and effective communication at no cost to the LEP individual.

Oral Language Assistance – Oral language interpretive services provided to LEP individuals either in person (at public service locations or at public information meetings), via telephone contact, or via video interpreting for the deaf.

⁹ Definition from Department of Justice Language Access Plan which can be found at: <http://www.justice.gov/open/language-access-plan.pdf>

Qualified Translator or Interpreter – A City of Houston employee, contracted translator, or interpreter who has demonstrated his/her competence to interpret or translate in an effective manner and have the knowledge and ability to communicate in English and in the primary language of the LEP individual.

Translation – The replacement of written text from one language (source language) into an equivalent written text language (target language).¹⁰

3. LANGUAGES

Executive Order 1-17 dictates that the City will provide essential public information in a *minimum* of five (5) commonly-used languages utilized by the City’s culturally diverse population. The five commonly-used languages are to be determined by a variety of relevant sources.

Utilizing data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2008-2012 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates for the City of Houston and other resource data, the Language Access Task Force submitted a recommendation that was approved by Mayor Annise D. Parker, that the City of Houston adopt the following five languages for implementation of E.O. 1-17:

- Spanish
- Vietnamese
- Chinese
- Arabic
- Urdu

Language Spoken at Home (Other than English)

City of Houston

	Speak English "Less Than Very Well"	Speak English "Very Well"	Total
Spanish or Creole	397,429	332,099	729,528
Vietnamese	21,584	11,701	33,285
Chinese	13,521	10,765	24,286
Arabic	3,324	5,256	8,580
Urdu	2,783	5,090	7,873
Korean	2,498	2,174	4,672
French or Creole	2,486	7,959	10,445
Hindi	2,041	6,162	8,203
Tagalog (Philippines)	1,551	5,434	6,985

Data on Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English derived from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2008-2012 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates.

OBO adopts the aforementioned five languages for interpretation and for translation of its essential public information.

It is important to note that the above list may not necessarily cover the languages of all individuals seeking programs, services, and activities from OBO. In an effort to avoid the misperception of unequal services or

¹⁰ Definition from Department of Justice Language Access Plan which can be found at: <http://www.iustice.gov/open/language-access-plan.pdf>

uneven coverage of language access services to communities who speak languages not identified in the list, OBO will follow the City-wide protocol for handling LEP individuals.

4. ORAL LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE

OBO will provide oral language interpretive services to LEP individuals, whether the service needed is in person, at the Houston Business Solutions Center, or OBO sponsored or co-sponsored public information meetings/events, via telephone contact, or via video interpreting for the deaf.

Oral language interpretive services will be provided by qualified OBO or City employees/staff who have demonstrated proficiency in English and reading, writing, speaking, and/or understanding the primary language of the LEP individual. Where necessary, through the City of Houston's 3-1-1 Service Help Division, OBO will utilize a qualified translator through the Language Line for provision of oral interpretive services to the LEP individual. Oral language interpretive services are **FREE** to the LEP individual.

OBO will create and maintain a list of qualified bi-lingual and multi-lingual staff who are capable of providing competent language interpreter services for the department. The list will contain the name, phone number, and language spoken by the employee. This point of contact list will be distributed to all OBO Department employees for their reference and use.

Individuals, whether City of Houston, OBO, or a contracted oral language service, shall have the following qualifications to be determined "qualified interpreters:"

- Have the ability to communicate accurately both in English and the language needing interpretation. The interpreter must also have the ability to interpret in an effective manner (i.e., consecutive, simultaneous, summarization, or slight translation).
- Have the knowledge and ability to communicate specialized terms and concepts in both languages.
- Understand the role as an impartial interpreter without deviating into the role of a counselor, legal advisor, or any other partialities.
- Understand and adhere to the City of Houston and OBO's privacy and confidentiality policies.

LEP family members (including children), neighbors, friends, acquaintances, and bystanders, should not be used to provide oral language interpretive services.

Note: The City of Houston's Administrative Procedure on handling LEP individuals will supersede this element of the LAP.

5. WRITTEN TRANSLATION OF ESSENTIAL PROGRAM INFORMATION

In accordance with the Mayor's Executive Order 1-17, OBO will translate and make available written information in Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, and Urdu. The following essential program publications have thus far been identified by the Department for translation:

- OBO Program Services Brochure (see Appendices)
- OBO Minority/Women/Small/Persons with Disabilities and Disadvantaged Enterprises Certification Program Flyer (see Appendices)
- Ins and Outs of City Contracting Flyer (see Appendices)

The Department will translate other essential public and program documents into the five languages based on need.

To further ensure OBO provides meaningful access to OBO services, programs, and activities, OBO will take reasonable steps to translate essential program information on the Department's websites at:

<http://www.houstontx.gov/obo/certification.html>
<http://www.houstontx.gov/hbhc/index.html>

Translation of the Department's website will be done using the Google translator, qualified City of Houston or OBO staff, a qualified translation contractor, or other means that may be identified in the City of Houston's Administrative Procedure.

OBO will also translate its Pre-Certification Workshop video into the dominant language of its constituency. Translation of this video into other languages will occur after the department determines the need, based on the Four-Factor Analysis described in this LAP.

OBO will follow the City of Houston's process for procurement of any qualified translation vendor needed to translate its written documents, if necessary.

If a request is made for essential documents that are not available in the above list of languages, when feasible, OBO will utilize a qualified translator to translate the requested document(s). The decision to translate the document(s) will be determined by the department director, assistant director, or his/her language access representative.

Note: The City of Houston's Administrative Procedure on handling LEP individuals will supersede this element of the LAP.

6. IDENTIFYING LEP INDIVIDUALS

It is important to identify an LEP individual at the point of first contact. OBO employees will make reasonable efforts to conduct an initial assessment of the need for language assistance services and to obtain such needed services. There are various ways in which OBO employees can make a determination as to whether or not an individual needs language assistance. These include, but are not limited to:

- Self-identification by the LEP individual or his/her companion.
- If such self-identification has been made, inquire as to the primary language of the individual needing language assistance services.
- Asking a qualified bilingual staff or qualified interpreter to verify the individual's primary language.
- Using a Language Identification Flashcard ¹¹ or "I Speak" Card or poster. ¹²

Once the primary language of the LEP has been identified, OBO employees shall secure a qualified interpreter from the Department's points of contact. If none are available, the employee will utilize the City of Houston's 3-1-1 Service Help Division for oral interpretive services through the Language Line. Every effort will be made to provide the LEP individual with written translations, if necessary.

Note: The City of Houston's Administrative Procedure on handling LEP individuals will supersede this element of the LAP.

¹¹ An example of a Language Flashcard from the U.S. Census Bureau is available at: <http://www.justice.gov/crt/lep/resources/ISpeakCards2004.pdf>

¹² "I Speak" Cards are available at: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/civilrights/PG584.htm>

7. STAFF TRAINING

E.O. 1-17 stipulates that all employees who routinely have direct, substantive interaction with the public shall be trained in language access policies and procedures. This shall include protocol for assisting LEP individuals. OBO has determined that in order for the implementation of the Mayor's E.O. 1-17 to be fully effective, it is important for all department staff to know how and when to access language assistance services.

The Department shall provide annual training to all new and existing employees. Training may include, but are not limited to such topics as:

- Mayor's Executive Order 1-17
- Presidential Executive Order 13166
- City of Houston Administrative Procedure on Handling LEP Individuals
- How to Identify LEP Individuals
- Accessing and Providing Language Assistance Services
- The Difference Between Interpretation and Translation
- Tracking and Monitoring Language Assistance Services

8. TRACKING AND MONITORING

The progress of OBO's LAP shall be reported to the OBO Director and iSpeak Houston Coordinator on a quarterly basis or as stipulated in the Administrative Procedure. The Department shall utilize the monitoring tool specified in the City's Administrative Procedure to collect and report required data on the provisions of language assistance services to LEP individuals. This information will be used to assist the Department in identifying the necessity for translations/interpretations of additional languages not indicated in this Plan.

OBO shall re-evaluate and when necessary, update its Language Access Plan, no less than every two (2) years. The Department will review the scope of its language assistance services and will take into consideration:

- The effectiveness of the language assistance services.
- Current data relevant to the City of Houston's LEP populations.
- Languages most frequently encountered.
- Technological changes.
- Budget expenses for translation and interpretation services.
- Department's current activities, programs, and services.

IV. PLAN APPROVAL

The Office of Business Opportunity respectfully submits its Language Access Plan on January 31, 2014. The Plan has been reviewed and approved as required by Executive Order 1-17.



Norma Meadows
OBO Language Access Coordinator

01-31-14

Date

1. APPROVAL SIGNATURE

Carlecia D. Wright

Carlecia D. Wright
Director

1.31.2013

Date

V. APPENDICES

A. ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING LEP INDIVIDUALS

This Administrative Procedure is pending final approval and will be added to OBO's Language Access Plan once finalized and signed by the Mayor.

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Ability to Speak English “Less Than Very Well” in City of Houston



**PLANNING &
DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT**

Source: 2012 American Community Survey,
U.S. Census Bureau
Date: January 17, 2014

Introduction

Data on 'Language spoken at home by Ability to Speak English' were derived from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2008-2012 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates. The data includes only population 5 years and over who have the ability to speak a language. This data is collected in an effort to measure the current use of languages other than English. The ACS collects information from a large annual sample of approximately 3 million housing unit addresses and therefore provides more reliable statistics. The usefulness of the self-rated English-speaking ability question was established in the 1980s.

Respondents were instructed to print the name of the non-English language spoken at home. If the person spoke more than one language other than English, the person was to report the language spoken more often.

City of Houston

English-speaking ability varied widely among the speakers of the top ten languages spoken in the City of Houston. The top ten languages spoken in Houston are: English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, French or Creole, Urdu, Arabic, Hindi, and Tagalog (Philippines) and Korean.

The Census Bureau distinguishes the ability to speak English between “Very Well” and “Less Than Very Well”. In Houston, the “Less Than Very Well” category ranked numerically are, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, Urdu, Korean, French or Creole, Hindi, and Tagalog (Philippines). Those who speak “Less Than Very Well” category varies between 397,429 persons (Spanish) being the highest and 1,551 persons (Philippines-Tagalog) being the lowest. The higher proportion indicates that they have a huge difficulty in conveying information clearly in English from normal conversations to obtaining assistance from non-profit organizations, Government etc.

Recommended 5 Languages based on numerical rank are (Speak English “Less than Very Well”): Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic and Urdu.

**Language Spoken at Home (Other than English)
City of Houston**

	Speak English "Less Than Very Well"	Speak English "Very Well"	Total
Spanish or Creole	397,429	332,099	729,528
Vietnamese	21,584	11,701	33,285
Chinese	13,521	10,765	24,286
Arabic	3,324	5,256	8,580
Urdu	2,783	5,090	7,873
Korean	2,498	2,174	4,672
French or Creole	2,486	7,959	10,445
Hindi	2,041	6,162	8,203
Tagalog (Philippines)	1,551	5,434	6,985

C. ESSENTIAL PUBLIC & PROGRAM DOCUMENTS

1. OBO PROGRAM SERVICES BROCHURE

EDUCATE. CONNECT. GROW.

Contact Information

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
832.393.0935

CERTIFICATION
832.393.0600

CONTRACT COMPLIANCE
832.393.0609

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
832.393.0623

HOUSTON BUSINESS SOLUTIONS CENTER
832.393.0954

“Certification opened the door to a world of opportunities. Undoubtedly, the Office of Business Opportunity paved the way for our growth, and we express our sincere appreciation for this extraordinary and essential support.”

Shaheen Chowdhury, PE, RPLS
President
Kuo & Associates, Inc.



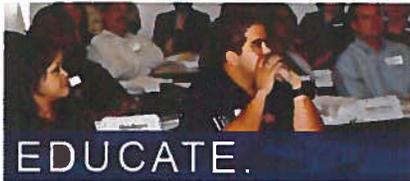
Promoting the GROWTH and SUCCESS of Local SMALL BUSINESSES



611 Walker, 7th Floor
Houston, TX 77002
WWW.HOUSTONTX.GOV/OBO

 FACEBOOK.COM/HOUSTONOBO

 TWITTER.COM/HOUSTONOBO



EDUCATE.

About OBO

MISSION

The Office of Business Opportunity (OBO) is committed to creating a competitive and diverse business environment in the City of Houston by promoting the growth and success of local small businesses with a special emphasis on historically underutilized groups by ensuring their meaningful participation in the government procurement process.

CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

OBO facilitates the local certification program that enables small businesses owned and controlled by minorities, women, and persons with disabilities to compete for locally funded goal-oriented contracting opportunities with the City of Houston. OBO also facilitates certification with the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise and Airport Concession Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE/ACDBE) Programs that allows DBEs to participate on US Department of Transportation funded contracts and ACDBEs to participate in Airport concessions.

Advantages of certification are:

- Listing in an online directory used by City departments and prime contractors to find certified firms to meet goal requirements on City contracts.
- Notifications about contracting opportunities with the City and other government agencies.
- City-certified firms are eligible for expedited certification with the Houston Minority Supplier Development Council (HMSDC) and the State of Texas Historically Underutilized Business (HUB) program.

Certification with the City expands access to contracting opportunities because our certification is also accepted by the following agencies:

- Environmental Protection Agency
- Houston Independent School District
- Houston Community College
- Houston Housing Authority
- METRO
- Port of Houston Authority
- Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts

PRE-CERTIFICATION WORKSHOP

The Certification team hosts a free weekly Pre-certification workshop Thursdays at 2 p.m.

611 Walker, 7th Floor in Downtown Houston

Visit www.houstontx.gov/obo/certification.html



CONNECT.

Business Development

HOUSTON BUSINESS SOLUTIONS CENTER (HBSC)

The Houston Business Solutions Center provides businesses with federal, state, county, and city license and permit information. HBSC also offers business management counseling via SCORE, resource referrals for financial assistance, educational workshops for individuals wishing to start their own business, business resource guides and access to loan financing via Accion Texas Inc. and Houston Business Development, Inc.

Visit www.houstontx.gov/hbsc

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

OBO collaborates with community partners to provide certified firms with services such as, business development resources, mentor protégé programs, and specialized vendor services.

Visit www.houstontx.gov/obo/busdev.html for more information.

NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

OBO sponsors or co-sponsors several events that allows small businesses to connect with key individuals and potential contracting opportunities. The networking events include: Meet the Buyer, Runway to Business Opportunities, Government Procurement Connections (GPC), and the Expo Business Opportunity Marketplace. Visit www.houstontx.gov/obo/busdev.html

CONTRACT COMPLIANCE

The Contract Compliance Division is responsible for monitoring City contracts in accordance with the laws and regulations mandated by government agencies pertaining to Prevailing Wage Rates, Minority/Women/ Small and Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (MWSDBE) Program compliance, and Equal Employment Opportunity laws. Contract Compliance also makes presentations at pre-bid and pre-construction conferences to explain the compliance guidelines and answer questions regarding Prevailing Wages and MWSDBE compliance.

Visit www.houstontx.gov/obo/contract.html



GROW.

Business Opportunity Programs

HIRE HOUSTON FIRST DESIGNATION

Hire Houston First is an initiative created by Mayor Annise Parker to promote economic opportunity for local Houston metropolitan businesses. The Office of Business Opportunity designates local businesses for participation in the economic benefits of the City's Hire Houston First initiative.

Visit www.houstontx.gov/obo/hirehoustonfirst.html

TWEETMYJOBS HOUSTON!

TweetMyJobs Houston! is a user-friendly online platform that connects local job seekers to local employers. This innovative workforce development tool uses web and mobile technology to facilitate quality connections between job seekers and employers.

TweetMyJobs Houston! provides small businesses with:

- Free job postings
- Quality matches
- Easy removal once job has expired

Visit www.houston.tweetmyjobs.com

LIFTOFF HOUSTON! BUSINESS PLAN COMPETITION

LiftOff Houston! is the City of Houston's annual business plan competition. This entrepreneurial initiative aims to encourage and empower Houstonians with the knowledge to achieve their goals of business ownership while contributing to the local growth and sustainability of the Houston economy.

The competition consists of four main stages: orientation, business workshops, business mentoring, and business plan presentations. A grand total of \$30,000 plus in-kind prizes will be awarded at the end of the competition.

Visit www.liftoffhouston.com





CITY OF HOUSTON
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BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY
EDUCATE. CONNECT. GROW.

Minority/Women/Disadvantaged/Persons with Disabilities and Small Business Enterprises Certification Program

Pre-Certification Workshop

The Mayor's Office of Business Opportunity would like to invite you to attend one of our weekly pre-certification workshops for more information on applying for M/W/D/PDBE and SBE certification. The workshop is conducted every Thursday, except holidays, at 611 Walker St. 7th floor Houston, TX 77002 at 2:00 p.m. This workshop is free of charge. For more information or to apply online please visit our website <http://www.houstontx.gov/obo/index.html>.

Advantages of Certification

Businesses certified with the City of Houston are provided with programs to educate business owners, connect business owners with the network of certified business owners, and tools to help business owners grow their business. The following is a list of advantages:

- Listing in the City's Online Directory of Certified Vendors, which is accessible on the City's website at WWW.HOUSTONTX.GOV (click Business, then MWBE/SBE Directory)
- Access to workshops, seminars, and newsletter.
- Bidding opportunities on City contracts.
- Certification is free and valid for a period of three years. Annual updates are required.
- Our Certification is also accepted by:
 - Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
 - Port of Houston Authority
 - METRO
 - Houston Independent School District
 - Houston Community College System
 - Houston Housing Authority
 - Kellogg Brown and Root
 - Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts

Certification Process

Program participation requires certification. The process takes approximately 90 days from when we receive a complete application packet, and includes the following steps:

- Pre-Certification Workshop
- Preliminary screening of Application
- Desk Audit
- Financial Audit
- Field Audit ♦
- Committee Review

♦ Not required for Small Business Enterprise Certification, only when applicable.

Certification Requirements

The following is a list of requirements for certification:

- Must be at least 51% owned, managed and controlled by a minority, female, or person with disability.
- Firm must be for profit, independent, and currently functioning.
- Maintain a significant presence in Harris, Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Liberty, Montgomery, or Waller counties.
- Meet the Small Business Administration Size Standard(s) for its industry classification(s).
- Owners must have the training/expertise to perform the work, and where required, has a license or certificate issued in his or her name.
- Persons with Disabilities Business Enterprise (PDBE) certification require applicants to submit a Disability Affidavit and an accompanying letter from a State of Texas certified medical doctor.
- For Disadvantaged Business Enterprise DBE certification, applicant must have a Personal Net Worth of less than \$1,320,000 – excluding value of home and ownership interest in the business. There is no local presence requirement.

611 Walker, 7th Floor, Houston, TX 77002 T. 832.393.0600 F. 832.393.0646
Complete your certification application online! Visit www.houstontx.gov/obo for details.



CITY OF HOUSTON
MAYOR'S OFFICE
of
BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY
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Ins and Outs of City Contracting

Soliciting business from the City or prime contractors can be a rewarding experience: understanding the procurement process, marketing your business, and conducting research are key components to success. The following are some suggestions that can help you secure City contracts.

I. GET A VENDOR NUMBER

All suppliers and contractors interested in bidding on products and services procured by the City of Houston, Strategic Purchasing Division, must complete and submit a *Supplier Registration Form* to receive a vendor number.

- The Supplier Registration Form can be submitted online through the City's Strategic Purchasing Division website at <https://purchasing.houstontx.gov/>, under the Supplier Registration Information section.
- Vendor numbers can be obtained in person from the Strategic Purchasing Division, 901 Bagby, Room B-120, in the basement of City Hall.

II. LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES

The Strategic Purchasing Notice to Bidders is available from the following resources:

- Each Friday, bid advertisements appear in the "Notice to Bidder" section of the Houston Business Journal. Some bid advertisements may be found in the Sunday edition of the Houston Chronicle.
- Bids are publicly posted according to State Statute and Charter provision. Bids for supplies and nonprofessional services are posted in the basement reception area of City Hall, 901 Bagby, Room B120.
- Bid advertisements appear weekly on the Municipal Access Channel. (TCI and Warner Cable TV).
- Bids and Requests for Proposals are available online at <https://purchasing.houstontx.gov/>, under the Formal Bids & RFP's section.

For more information about Bids or RFP's attend pre-bid and pre-proposal conferences to meet potential prime contractors:

- Schedule of pre-bid and pre-proposal conferences can be found on the City's Strategic Purchasing Division's web site at <https://purchasing.houstontx.gov/>.
- Contact successful low bidders to show how you can help them meet the M/W/D/PDBE and SBE goals.

For Professional Service Providers:

- Find the City departments that utilize your service. Call the Mayor's Office of Business Opportunity Division at (832) 393-0600 for further assistance.
- Architects and Engineers (A&E) should go to 611 Walker, 5th Floor, to pick up form PWE-100 for inclusion in the City's A&E database. This document can also be found online at http://documents.publicworks.houstontx.gov/documents/a-e_qual/pwe100in.pdf.
- Contact the City department to let them know what you do and request to be included on the Request for Proposal (RFP) list.

Please visit the Mayor's Office of Business Opportunity (OBO) website <http://www.houstontx.gov/obo/>, for more information about M/W/D/PDBE and SBE participation in the City's procurement process. A comprehensive list of Current Contracting Opportunities can also be found on the OBO website.

III. SUBMIT A BID OR PROPOSAL

Before submitting a bid or proposal, make sure all specifications are met.

- Read everything and make certain that your goods or services meet City specifications.
- Sign your bid and turn your bid/offer in on time. (No exceptions for late responses).
- If you are unsuccessful, keep trying. Go to the City Secretary's Office (City Hall Annex, Public Level, 900 Bagby) to review the successful bidder's submission to be better prepared next time.

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